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SAMUEL JOHNSON, LL.D.

BY

LORD MACAULAY.



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1878.



# SAMUEL JOHNSON.

(SEPTEMBER, 1831.)

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*The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D. Including a Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides, by James Boswell, Esq. A new Edition, with numerous Additions and Notes.*  
By JOHN WILSON CROKER, LL.D., F.R.S. 5 vols. 8vo.  
London: 1831.

THIS work has greatly disappointed us. Whatever faults we may have been prepared to find in it, we fully expected that it would be a valuable addition to English literature; that it would contain many curious facts and many judicious remarks; that the style of the notes would be neat, clear, and precise; and that the typographical execution would be, as in new editions of classical works it ought to be, almost faultless. We are sorry to be obliged to say that the merits of Mr. Croker's performance are on a par with those of a certain leg of mutton on which Dr. Johnson dined, while travelling from London to Oxford, and which he, with characteristic energy, pronounced to be "as bad as bad could be, ill fed, ill killed, ill kept, and ill dressed." This edition is ill compiled, ill arranged, ill written, and ill printed.

Nothing in the work has astonished us so much as the ignorance or carelessness of Mr. Croker with respect to facts and dates. Many of his blunders are such as we should be surprised to hear any well-educated gentleman commit even in conversation. The notes absolutely swarm with misstatements into which the editor never would have fallen if he had taken the slightest pains to investigate the truth of his assertions, or if he had even been well acquainted with the book on which he undertook to comment. We will give a few instances.

Mr. Croker tells us in a note that Derrick, who was master of the ceremonies at Bath, died very poor in 1760.\* We read on; and, a few pages later, we find Dr. Johnson and Boswell talking of this same Derrick as still living and reigning, as having retrieved his character, as possessing so much power over his subjects at Bath that his opposition might be fatal to Sheridan's lectures on oratory.† And all this is in 1763. The fact is that Derrick died in 1769.

In one note we read that Sir Herbert Croft, the author of that pompous and foolish account of Young which appears among the "Lives of the Poets," died in 1805.‡ Another note in the same volume states that this same Sir Herbert Croft died at Paris, after residing abroad for fifteen years, on the 27th of April, 1816.§

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\* Vol. i., p. 394.

† Vol. iv., p. 321.

‡ Vol. i., p. 404.

§ Vol. iv., p. 423.

Mr. Croker informs us that Sir William Forbes of Pitsligo, the author of the "Life of Beattie," died in 1816.\* A Sir William Forbes undoubtedly died in that year, but not the Sir William Forbes in question, whose death took place in 1806. It is notorious, indeed, that the biographer of Beattie lived just long enough to complete the history of his friend. Eight or nine years before the date which Mr. Croker has assigned for Sir William's death, Sir Walter Scott lamented that event in the introduction to the fourth canto of "Marmion." Every school-girl knows the lines:

"Scarce had lamented Forbes paid  
The tribute to his Minstrel's shade;  
The tale of friendship scarce was told,  
Ere the narrator's heart was cold;  
Far may we search before we find  
A heart so manly and so kind!"

In one place we are told that Allan Ramsay, the painter, was born in 1709, and died in 1784;† in another, that he died in 1784, in the seventy-first year of his age.‡

In one place Mr. Croker says that at the commencement of the intimacy between Dr. Johnson and Mrs. Thrale, in 1765, the lady was twenty-five years old.§ In other places he says that Mrs. Thrale's thirty-fifth year coincided with Johnson's seventieth.|| Johnson was born in 1709.

\* Vol. ii., p. 262.    † Vol. iv., p. 105.    ‡ Vol. v., p. 281.  
§ Vol. i., p. 510.    || Vol. iv., pp. 271, 322.

If, therefore, Mrs. Thrale's thirty-fifth year coincided with Johnson's seventieth, she could have been only twenty-one years old in 1765. This is not all. Mr. Croker, in another place, assigns the year 1777 as the date of the complimentary lines which Johnson made on Mrs. Thrale's thirty-fifth birthday.\* If this date be correct, Mrs. Thrale must have been born in 1742, and could have been only twenty-three when her acquaintance with Johnson commenced. Mr. Croker therefore gives us three different statements as to her age. Two of the three must be incorrect. We will not decide between them; we will only say that the reasons which Mr. Croker gives for thinking that Mrs. Thrale was exactly thirty-five years old when Johnson was seventy appear to us utterly frivolous.

Again, Mr. Croker informs his readers that "Lord Mansfield survived Johnson full ten years."† Lord Mansfield survived Dr. Johnson just eight years and a quarter.

Johnson found in the library of a French lady, whom he visited during his short visit to Paris, some works which he regarded with great disdain. "I looked," says he, "into the books in the lady's closet, and, in contempt, showed them to Mr. Thrale. 'Prince Titi,' 'Bibliothèque des Fées,' and other books."‡ "The 'History of Prince Titi,'" observes Mr. Croker, "was said to be the autobiography of Frederic, Prince of Wales, but

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\* Vol. iii., p. 463. † Vol. ii., p. 151. ‡ Vol. iii., p. 271.

was probably written by Ralph, his secretary." A more absurd note never was penned. The history of Prince Titi to which Mr. Croker refers, whether written by Prince Frederic or by Ralph, was certainly never published. If Mr. Croker had taken the trouble to read with attention that very passage in Park's "Royal and Noble Authors," which he cites as his authority, he would have seen that the manuscript was given up to the Government. Even if this memoir had been printed, it is not very likely to find its way into a French lady's bookcase. And would any man in his senses speak contemptuously of a French lady for having in her possession an English work so curious and interesting as a "Life of Prince Frederic," whether written by himself or by a confidential secretary, must have been? The history at which Johnson laughed was a very proper companion to the "Bibliothèque des Fées," a fairy tale about good Prince Titi and naughty Prince Violent. Mr. Croker may find it in the "Magasin des Enfants," the first French book which the little girls of England read to their governesses.

Mr. Croker states that Mr. Henry Bate, who afterward assumed the name of Dudley, was proprietor of the *Morning Herald*, and fought a duel with George Robinson Stoney, in consequence of some attacks on Lady Strathmore which appeared in that paper.\* Now, Mr. Bate was then con-

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\* Vol. v., p. 196.

nected, not with the *Morning Herald*, but with the *Morning Post*; and the dispute took place before the *Morning Herald* was in existence. The duel was fought in January, 1777. The Chronicle of the "Annual Register" for that year contains an account of the transaction, and distinctly states that Mr. Bate was editor of the *Morning Post*. The *Morning Herald*, as any person may see by looking at any number of it, was not established till some years after this affair. For this blunder there is, we must acknowledge, some excuse; for it certainly seems almost incredible to a person living in our time that any human being should ever have stooped to fight with a writer in the *Morning Post*.

"James de Duglas," says Mr. Croker, "was requested by King Robert Bruce, in his last hours, to repair with his heart to Jerusalem, and humbly to deposit it at the sepulchre of our Lord, which he did in 1329."\* Now, it is well known that he did no such thing, and for a very sufficient reason, because he was killed by the way. Nor was it in 1329 that he set out. Robert Bruce died in 1329, and the expedition of Douglas took place in the following year, "Quand le printems vint et la saison," says Froissart; in June, 1330, says Lord Hailes, whom Mr. Croker cites as the authority for his statement.

Mr. Croker tells us that the great Marquess of Montrose was beheaded at Edinburgh in 1650.†

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\* Vol. iv., p. 29.

† Vol. ii., p. 526.



There is not a forward boy at any school in England who does not know that the marquess was hanged. The account of the execution is one of the finest passages in Lord Clarendon's "History." We can scarcely suppose that Mr. Croker has never read that passage; and yet we can scarcely suppose that any person who has ever perused so noble and pathetic a story can have utterly forgotten all its most striking circumstances.

"Lord Townshend," says Mr. Croker, "was not Secretary of State till 1720."\* Can Mr. Croker possibly be ignorant that Lord Townshend was made Secretary of State at the accession of George I. in 1714, that he continued to be Secretary of State till he was displaced by the intrigues of Sunderland and Stanhope at the close of 1716, and that he returned to the office of Secretary of State, not in 1720, but in 1721?

Mr. Croker, indeed, is generally unfortunate in his statements respecting the Townshend family. He tells us that Charles Townshend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was "nephew of the Prime Minister, and son of a peer who was Secretary of State, and leader of the House of Lords."† Charles Townshend was not nephew, but grandnephew, of the Duke of Newcastle; not son, but grandson, of the Lord Townshend who was Secretary of State and leader of the House of Lords.

"General Burgoyne surrendered at Saratoga,"

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\* Vol. iii., p. 52.

† Vol. iii., p. 368.

says Mr. Croker, "in March, 1778."\* General Burgoyne surrendered on the 17th of October, 1777.

"Nothing," says Mr. Croker, "can be more unfounded than the assertion that Byng fell a martyr to *political party*. By a strange coincidence of circumstances, it happened that there was a total change of administration between his condemnation and his death: so that one party presided at his trial, and another at his execution: there can be no stronger proof that he was *not* a political martyr."† Now, what will our readers think of this writer, when we assure them that this statement, so confidently made, respecting events so notorious, is absolutely untrue? One and the same administration was in office when the court-martial on Byng commenced its sittings, through the whole trial, at the condemnation, and at the execution. In the month of November, 1756, the Duke of Newcastle and Lord Hardwicke resigned; the Duke of Devonshire became First Lord of the Treasury, and Mr. Pitt Secretary of State. This administration lasted till the month of April, 1757. Byng's court-martial began to sit on the 28th of December, 1756. He was shot on the 14th of March, 1757. There is something at once diverting and provoking in the cool and authoritative manner in which Mr. Croker makes these random assertions. We do not suspect him of intentionally falsifying

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\* Vol. iv., p. 222.

† Vol. i., p. 298.

history. But of this high literary misdemeanor we do without hesitation accuse him, that he has no adequate sense of the obligation which a writer who professes to relate facts owes to the public. We accuse him of a negligence and an ignorance analogous to that *crassa negligentia*, and that *crassa ignorantia*, on which the law animadverts in magistrates and surgeons, even when malice and corruption are not imputed. We accuse him of having undertaken a work which, if not performed with strict accuracy, must be very much worse than useless, and of having performed it as if the difference between an accurate and an inaccurate statement was not worth the trouble of looking into the most common book of reference.

But we must proceed. These volumes contain mistakes more gross, if possible, than any that we have yet mentioned. Boswell has recorded some observations made by Johnson on the changes which had taken place in Gibbon's religious opinions. That Gibbon, when a lad at Oxford, turned Catholic is well known. "It is said," cried Johnson, laughing, "that he has been a Mahommedan." "This sarcasm," says the editor, "probably alludes to the tenderness with which Gibbon's malevolence to Christianity induced him to treat Mahommedanism in his history." Now, the sarcasm was uttered in 1776; and that part of the "History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" which relates to Mahommedanism was not published till 1788,

twelve years after the date of this conversation, and near four years after the death of Johnson.\*

"It was in the year 1761," says Mr. Croker, "that Goldsmith published his 'Vicar of Wakefield.' This leads the editor to observe a more serious inaccuracy of Mrs. Piozzi than Mr. Boswell notices, when he says Johnson left her table to go and sell the 'Vicar of Wakefield' for Goldsmith. Now, Dr. Johnson was not acquainted with

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\* A defense of this blunder was attempted. That the celebrated chapters in which Gibbon has traced the progress of Mahommedanism were not written in 1776 could not be denied. But it was confidently asserted that his partiality to Mahommedanism appeared in his first volume. This assertion is untrue. No passage which can by any art be construed into the faintest indication of the faintest partiality for Mahommedanism has ever been quoted or ever will be quoted from the first volume of the "History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire."

To what, then, it has been asked, could Johnson allude? Possibly to some anecdote or some conversation of which all trace is lost. One conjecture may be offered, though with diffidence. Gibbon tells us in his memoirs, that at Oxford he took a fancy for studying Arabic, and was prevented from doing so by the remonstrances of his tutor. Soon after this, the young man fell in with Bossuet's controversial writings, and was speedily converted by them to the Roman Catholic faith. The apostasy of a gentleman commoner would of course be for a time the chief subject of conversation in the common room of Magdalene. His whim about Arabic learning would naturally be mentioned, and would give occasion to some jokes about the probability of his turning Musulman. If such jokes were made, Johnson, who frequently visited Oxford, was very likely to hear of them.

the Thrales till 1765, four years after the book had been published."\* Mr. Croker, in reprehending the fancied inaccuracy of Mrs. Thrale, has himself shown a degree of inaccuracy, or, to speak more properly, a degree of ignorance, hardly credible. In the first place, Johnson became acquainted with the Thrales, not in 1765, but in 1764, and during the last weeks of 1764 dined with them every Thursday, as is written in Mrs. Piozzi's anecdotes. In the second place, Goldsmith published the "Vicar of Wakefield," not in 1761, but in 1766. Mrs. Thrale does not pretend to remember the precise date of the summons which called Johnson from her table to the help of his friend. She says only that it was near the beginning of her acquaintance with Johnson, and certainly not later than 1766. Her accuracy is therefore completely vindicated. It was probably after one of her Thursday dinners in 1764 that the celebrated scene of the landlady, the sheriff's officer, and the bottle of madeira took place.†

The very page which contains this monstrous blunder contains another blunder, if possible, more monstrous still. Sir Joseph Mawbey, a foolish member of Parliament, at whose speeches and whose pigstyes the wits of Brookes's were, fifty years ago, in the habit of laughing most unmercifully, stated, on the authority of Garrick, that

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\* Vol. v., p. 409.

† This paragraph has been altered; and a slight inaccuracy, immaterial to the argument, has been removed.

Johnson, while sitting in a coffee-house at Oxford, about the time of his doctor's degree, used some contemptuous expressions respecting Home's play and Macpherson's "Ossian." "Many men," he said, "many women, and many children, might have written 'Douglas.'" Mr. Croker conceives that he has detected an inaccuracy, and glories over poor Sir Joseph in a most characteristic manner. "I have quoted this anecdote solely with the view of showing to how little credit hearsay anecdotes are in general entitled. Here is a story published by Sir Joseph Mawbey, a member of the House of Commons, and a person every way worthy of credit, who says he had it from Garrick. Now mark: Johnson's visit to Oxford, about the time of his doctor's degree, was in 1754, the first time he had been there since he left the university. But "Douglas" was not acted till 1756, and "Ossian" not published till 1760. All, therefore, that is new in Sir Joseph Mawbey's story is false."\* Assuredly we need not go far to find ample proof that a member of the House of Commons may commit a very gross error. Now mark, say we, in the language of Mr. Croker. The fact is, that Johnson took his master's degree in 1754,† and his doctor's degree in 1775.‡ In the spring of 1776,§ he paid a visit to Oxford, and at this visit a conversation respecting the works of Home and Macpherson might have taken place, and, in all

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\* Vol. v., p. 409.  
† Vol. iii., p. 205.

† Vol. i., p. 262.  
§ Vol. iii., p. 326.

probability, did take place. The only real objection to the story Mr. Croker has missed. Boswell states, apparently on the best authority, that as early at least as the year 1763, Johnson, in conversation with Blair, used the same expressions respecting "Ossian" which Sir Joseph represents him as having used respecting "Douglas."\* Sir Joseph, or Garrick, confounded, we suspect, the two stories. But their error is venial compared with that of Mr. Croker.

We will not multiply instances of this scandalous inaccuracy. It is clear that a writer who, even when warned by the text on which he is commenting, falls into such mistakes as these, is entitled to no confidence whatever. Mr. Croker has committed an error of five years with respect to the publication of Goldsmith's novel, an error of twelve years with respect to the publication of part of Gibbon's "History," an error of twenty-one years with respect to an event in Johnson's life so important as the taking of the doctoral degree. Two of these three errors he has committed while ostentatiously displaying his own accuracy, and correcting what he represents as the loose assertions of others. How can his readers take on trust his statements concerning the births, marriages, divorces, and deaths of a crowd of people whose names are scarcely known to this generation? It is not likely that a person who is ignorant of what almost everybody knows can

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\* Vol. i., p. 405.

know that of which almost everybody is ignorant. We did not open this book with any wish to find blemishes in it. We have made no curious researches. The work itself, and a very common knowledge of literary and political history, have enabled us to detect the mistakes which we have pointed out, and many other mistakes of the same kind. We must say, and we say it with regret, that we do not consider the authority of Mr. Croker, unsupported by other evidence, as sufficient to justify any writer who may follow him in relating a single anecdote, or in assigning a date to a single event.

Mr. Croker shows almost as much ignorance and heedlessness in his criticisms as in his statements concerning facts. Dr. Johnson said, very reasonably as it appears to us, that some of the satires of Juvenal are too gross for imitation. Mr. Croker, who, by-the-way, is angry with Johnson for defending Prior's tales against the charge of indecency, resents this aspersion on Juvenal, and indeed refuses to believe that the doctor can have said anything so absurd. "He probably said—some *passages* of them—for there are none of Juvenal's satires to which the same objection may be made as to one of Horace's, that it is *altogether* gross and licentious."\* Surely Mr. Croker can never have read the second and ninth satires of Juvenal.

Indeed, the decisions of this editor on points of

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\* Vol. i., p. 167.



classical learning, though pronounced in a very authoritative tone, are generally such that, if a school-boy under our care were to utter them, our soul assuredly should not spare for his crying. It is no disgrace to a gentleman who has been engaged during near thirty years in political life that he has forgotten his Greek and Latin. But he becomes justly ridiculous if, when no longer able to construe a plain sentence, he affects to sit in judgment on the most delicate questions of style and metre. From one blunder—a blunder which no good scholar would have made—Mr. Croker was saved, as he informs us, by Sir Robert Peel, who quoted a passage exactly in point from Horace. We heartily wish that Sir Robert, whose classical attainments are well known, had been more frequently consulted. Unhappily he was not always at his friend's elbow; and we have therefore a rich abundance of the strangest errors. Boswell has preserved a poor epigram by Johnson, inscribed "*Ad Lauram parituram.*" Mr. Croker censures the poet for applying the word *puella* to a lady in Laura's situation, and for talking of the beauty of Lucina. "*Lucina,*" he says, "*was never famed for her beauty.*"\* If Sir Robert Peel had seen this note, he probably would have again refuted Mr. Croker's criticisms by an appeal to Horace. In the secular ode, *Lucina* is used as one of the names of *Diana*, and the beauty of *Diana* is extolled by all the most

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\* Vol. i., p. 133.

orthodox doctors of the ancient mythology, from Homer, in his "Odyssey," to Claudian, in his "Rape of Proserpine." In another ode, Horace describes Diana as the goddess who assists the "laborantes utero puellas." But we are ashamed to detain our readers with this fourth-form learning.

Boswell found, in his tour to the Hebrides, an inscription written by a Scotch minister. It runs thus: "Joannes Macleod, etc., gentis suæ Philarchus, etc., Floræ Macdonald matrimoniali vinculo conjugatus turrem hanc Beganodunensem proævorum habitaculum longe vetustissimum, diu penitus labefactatam, anno æræ vulgaris MDCLXXXVI. instauravit." "The minister," says Mr. Croker, "seems to have been no contemptible Latinist. Is not Philarchus a very happy term to express the paternal and kindly authority of the head of a clan?"\* The composition of this eminent Latinist, short as it is, contains several words that are just as much Coptic as Latin, to say nothing of the incorrect structure of the sentence. The word Philarchus, even if it were a happy term expressing a paternal and kindly authority, would prove nothing for the minister's Latin, whatever it might prove for his Greek. But it is clear that the word Philarchus means, not a man who rules by love, but a man who loves rule. The Attic writers of the best age used the word *φιλαρχος* in the sense which we

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\* Vol. ii., p. 458.

assign to it. Would Mr. Croker translate φιλόσοφος, a man who acquires wisdom by means of love, or φιλοκερδής, a man who makes money by means of love? In fact, it requires no Bentley or Casaubon to perceive that Philarchus is merely a false spelling for Phylarchus, the chief of a tribe.

Mr. Croker has favored us with some Greek of his own. "At the altar," says Dr. Johnson, "I recommended my θ φ." "These letters," says the editor, "(which Dr. Strahan seems not to have understood), probably mean θνητοι φίλοι, *departed friends*."\* Johnson was not a first-rate Greek scholar; but he knew more Greek than most boys when they leave school; and no school-boy could venture to use the word θνητοι in the sense which Mr. Croker ascribes to it without imminent danger of a flogging.

Mr. Croker has also given us a specimen of his skill in translating Latin. Johnson wrote a note in which he consulted his friend, Dr. Lawrence, on the propriety of losing some blood.

\* Vol. iv., p. 251. An attempt was made to vindicate this blunder by quoting a grossly corrupt passage from the *Ἰκέτιδες* of Euripides:

βᾶθι καὶ ἀντίασον γονάτων, ἔπι χεῖρα βαλοῦσα,  
τέκνων τε θνατῶν κομίσαι δέμας.

The true reading, as every scholar knows, is, τέκνων τεθνεώτων κομίσαι δέμας. Indeed without this emendation it would not be easy to construe the words, even if θνατῶν could bear the meaning which Mr. Croker assigns to it.

The note contains these words: "Si per te licet, imperatur nuncio Holderum ad me deducere." Johnson should rather have written "imperatum est." But the meaning of the words is perfectly clear. "If you say yes, the messenger has orders to bring Holder to me." Mr. Croker translates the words as follows: "If you consent, pray tell the messenger to bring Holder to me."\* If Mr. Croker is resolved to write on points of classical learning, we would advise him to begin by giving an hour every morning to our old friend Corde-rius.

Indeed, we cannot open any volume of this work in any place, and turn it over for two minutes in any direction, without lighting on a blunder. Johnson, in his "Life of Tickell," stated that the poem entitled "The Royal Progress," which appears in the last volume of *The Spectator*, was written on the accession of George the First. The word "arrival" was afterward substituted for "accession." "The reader will observe," says Mr. Croker, "that the Whig term *accession*, which might imply legality, was altered into a statement of the simple fact of King George's *arrival*."† Now, Johnson, though a bigoted Tory, was not quite such a fool as Mr. Croker here represents him to be. In the "Life of Granville, Lord Lansdowne," which stands a very few pages from the "Life of Tickell," mention is made of the accession of Anne, and of the accession of George the

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\* Vol. v., p. 17.

† Vol. iv., p. 425.

First. The word arrival was used in the "Life of Tickell" for the simplest of all reasons. It was used because the subject of the poem called "The Royal Progress" was the arrival of the king, and not his accession, which took place near two months before his arrival.

The editor's want of perspicacity is indeed very amusing. He is perpetually telling us that he cannot understand something in the text which is as plain as language can make it. "Mattaire," said Dr. Johnson, "wrote Latin verses from time to time, and published a set in his old age, which he called 'Senilia,' in which he shows so little learning or taste in writing as to make Carteret a dactyl."\* Hereupon we have this note: "The editor does not understand this objection, nor the following observation." The following observation, which Mr. Croker cannot understand, is simply this: "In matters of genealogy," says Johnson, "it is necessary to give the bare names as they are. But in poetry and in prose of any elegance in the writing, they require to have inflection given to them." If Mr. Croker had told Johnson that this was unintelligible, the doctor would probably have replied, as he replied on another occasion, "I have found you a reason, sir; I am not bound to find you an understanding." Everybody who knows anything of Latinity knows that, in genealogical tables, Joannes Baro de Carteret, or Vice-comes de Carteret, may be tolerated,

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\* Vol. iv., p. 335.

but that in compositions which pretend to elegance, Carteretus, or some other form which admits of inflection, ought to be used.

All our readers have doubtless seen the two distichs of Sir William Jones, respecting the division of the time of a lawyer. One of the distichs is translated from some old Latin lines; the other is original. The former runs thus:

“Six hours to sleep, to law’s grave study six,  
Four spend in prayer, the rest on nature fix.”

“Rather,” says Sir William Jones,

“Six hours to law, to soothing slumbers seven,  
Ten to the world allot, and all to heaven.”

The second couplet puzzles Mr. Croker strangely. “Sir William,” says he, “has shortened his day to twenty-three hours, and the general advice of ‘all to heaven’ destroys the peculiar appropriation of a certain period to religious exercises.”\* Now, we did not think that it was in human dulness to miss the meaning of the lines so completely. Sir William distributes twenty-three hours among various employments. One hour is thus left for devotion. The reader expects that the verse will end with “and one to heaven.” The whole point of the lines consists in the unexpected substitution of “all” for “one.” The conceit is wretched enough; but it is perfectly intelligible, and never, we will venture to say, perplexed man, woman, or child before.

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\* Vol. v., p. 233.

Poor Tom Davies, after failing in business, tried to live by his pen. Johnson called him "an author generated by the corruption of a bookseller." This is a very obvious, and even a commonplace, allusion to the famous dogma of the old physiologists. Dryden made a similar allusion to that dogma before Johnson was born. Mr. Croker, however, is unable to understand what the doctor meant. "The expression," he says, "seems not quite clear." And he proceeds to talk about the generation of insects, about bursting into gaudier life, and Heaven knows what.\*

There is a still stranger instance of the editor's talent for finding out difficulty in what is perfectly plain. "No man," said Johnson, "can now be made a bishop for his learning and piety." "From this too just observation," says Boswell, "there are some eminent exceptions." Mr. Croker is puzzled by Boswell's very natural and simple language. "That a general observation should be pronounced *too just*, by the very person who admits that it is not universally just, is not a little odd."†

A very large proportion of the two thousand five hundred notes which the editor boasts of having added to those of Boswell and Malone, consists of the flattest and poorest reflections—reflections such as the least intelligent reader is quite competent to make for himself, and such

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\* Vol. iv., p. 323.

† Vol. iii., p. 228.

as no intelligent reader would think it worth while to utter aloud. They remind us of nothing so much as of those profound and interesting annotations which are pencilled by sempstresses and apothecaries' boys on the dog-eared margins of novels borrowed from circulating libraries: "How beautiful!" "Cursed prosy!" "I don't like Sir Reginald Malcolm at all;" "I think Pelham is a sad dandy." Mr. Croker is perpetually stopping us in our progress through the most delightful narrative in the language, to observe that really Dr. Johnson was very rude; that he talked more for victory than for truth; that his taste for port-wine with capillaire in it was very odd; that Boswell was impertinent; that it was foolish in Mrs. Thrale to marry the music-master; and so forth.

We cannot speak more favorably of the manner in which the notes are written than of the matter of which they consist. We find in every page words used in wrong senses, and constructions which violate the plainest rules of grammar. We have the vulgarism of "mutual friend" for "common friend." We have "fallacy" used as synonymous with "falsehood." We have many such inextricable labyrinths of pronouns as that which follows: "Lord Erskine was fond of this anecdote; he told it to the editor the first time that he had the honor of being in his company." Lastly, we have a plentiful supply of sentences resembling those which we subjoin. "Markland, *who*, with Jortin and Thirlby, Johnson calls three



contemporaries of great eminence.”\* “Warburton himself did not feel, as Mr. Boswell was disposed to think he did, kindly or gratefully of Johnson.”† “It was *him* that Horace Walpole called a man who never made a bad figure but as an author.”‡ One or two of these solecisms should perhaps be attributed to the printer, who has certainly done his best to fill both the text and the notes with all sorts of blunders. In truth, he and the editor have between them made the book so bad, that we do not well see how it could have been worse.

When we turn from the commentary of Mr. Croker to the work of our old friend Boswell, we find it not only worse printed than in any other edition with which we are acquainted, but mangled in the most wanton manner. Much that Boswell inserted in his narrative is, without the shadow of a reason, degraded to the appendix. The editor has also taken upon himself to alter or omit passages which he considers as indecorous. This prudery is quite unintelligible to us. There is nothing immoral in Boswell's book, nothing which tends to inflame the passions. He sometimes uses plain words. But if this be a taint which requires expurgation, it would be desirable to begin by expurgating the morning and evening lessons. The delicate office which Mr. Croker has undertaken he has performed in the most capricious manner. One strong, old-fash-

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\* Vol. iv., p. 377.    † Vol. iv., p. 415.    ‡ Vol. ii., p. 461.

ioned English word, familiar to all who read their Bibles, is changed for a softer synonyme in some passages, and suffered to stand unaltered in others. In one place a faint allusion made by Johnson to an indelicate subject—an allusion so faint that, till Mr. Croker's note pointed it out to us, we had never noticed it, and of which we are quite sure that the meaning would never be discovered by any of those for whose sake books are expurgated—is altogether omitted. In another place, a coarse and stupid jest of Dr. Taylor on the same subject, expressed in the broadest language—almost the only passage, as far as we remember, in all Boswell's book, which we should have been inclined to leave out—is suffered to remain.

We complain, however, much more of the additions than of the omissions. We have half of Mrs. Thrale's book, scraps of Mr. Tyers, scraps of Mr. Murphy, scraps of Mr. Cradock, long prosings of Sir John Hawkins, and connecting observations by Mr. Croker himself, inserted into the midst of Boswell's text. To this practice we most decidedly object. An editor might as well publish Thucydides, with extracts from Diodorus interspersed, or incorporate the "Lives" of Suetonius with the "History and Annals" of Tacitus. Mr. Croker tells us, indeed, that he has done only what Boswell wished to do, and was prevented from doing by the law of copyright. We doubt this greatly. Boswell has studiously abstained from availing himself of the informa-

tion given by his rivals, on many occasions on which he might have cited them without subjecting himself to the charge of piracy. Mr. Croker has himself, on one occasion, remarked very justly that Boswell was unwilling to owe any obligation to Hawkins. But, be this as it may, if Boswell had quoted from Sir John and from Mrs. Thrale, he would have been guided by his own taste and judgment in selecting his quotations. On what Boswell quoted he would have commented with perfect freedom; and the borrowed passages, so selected, and accompanied by such comments, would have become original. They would have dovetailed into the work. No hitch, no crease, would have been discernible. The whole would appear one and indivisible,

“*Ut per læve severos  
Effundat junctura ungues.*”

This is not the case with Mr. Croker's insertions. They are not chosen as Boswell would have chosen them. They are not introduced as Boswell would have introduced them. They differ from the quotations scattered through the original “*Life of Johnson*” as a withered bow stuck in the ground differs from a tree skilfully transplanted with all its life about it.

Not only do these anecdotes disfigure Boswell's book; they are themselves disfigured by being inserted in his book. The charm of Mrs. Thrale's little volume is utterly destroyed. The feminine quickness of observation, the feminine softness

of heart, the colloquial incorrectness and vivacity of style, the little amusing airs of a half-learned lady, the delightful garrulity, the "dear Dr. Johnson," the "it was so comical," all disappear in Mr. Croker's quotations. The lady ceases to speak in the first person; and her anecdotes, in the process of transfusion, become as flat as champagne in decanters, or Herodotus in Beloe's version. Sir John Hawkins, it is true, loses nothing; and for the best of reasons. Sir John had nothing to lose.

The course which Mr. Croker ought to have taken is quite clear. He should have reprinted Boswell's narrative precisely as Boswell wrote it; and in the notes or the appendix he should have placed any anecdotes which he might have thought it advisable to quote from other writers. This would have been a much more convenient course for the reader, who has now constantly to keep his eye on the margin in order to see whether he is perusing Boswell, Mrs. Thrale, Murphy, Hawkins, Tyers, Cradock, or Mr. Croker. We greatly doubt whether even the "Tour to the Hebrides" ought to have been inserted in the midst of the "Life." There is one marked distinction between the two works. Most of the "Tour" was seen by Johnson in manuscript. It does not appear that he ever saw any part of the "Life."

We love, we own, to read the great productions of the human mind as they were written. We have this feeling even about scientific treatises;

though we know that the sciences are always in a state of progression, and that the alterations made by a modern editor in an old book on any branch of natural or political philosophy are likely to be improvements. Some errors have been detected by writers of this generation in the speculations of Adam Smith. A short cut has been made to much knowledge at which Sir Isaac Newton arrived through arduous and circuitous paths. Yet we still look with peculiar veneration on the "Wealth of Nations" and on the "Principia," and should regret to see either of those great works garbled even by the ablest hands. But in works which owe much of their interest to the character and situation of the writers, the case is infinitely stronger. What man of taste and feeling can endure *rifacimenti*, harmonies, abridgments, expurgated editions? Who ever reads a stage-copy of a play when he can procure the original? Who ever cut open Mrs. Siddons's "Milton?" Who ever got through ten pages of Mr. Gilpin's translation of John Bunyan's "Pilgrim" into modern English? Who would lose, in the confusion of a Diatessaron, the peculiar charm which belongs to the narrative of the disciple whom Jesus loved? The feeling of a reader who has become intimate with any great original work is that which Adam expressed toward his bride:

"Should God create another Eve, and I  
Another rib afford, yet loss of thee  
Would never from my heart."

No substitute, however exquisitely formed, will fill the void left by the original. The second beauty may be equal or superior to the first; but still it is not she.

The reasons which Mr. Croker has given for incorporating passages from Sir John Hawkins and Mrs. Thrale with the narrative of Boswell would vindicate the adulteration of half the classical works in the language. If Pepys's "Diary" and Mrs. Hutchinson's "Memoirs" had been published a hundred years ago, no human being can doubt that Mr. Hume would have made great use of those books in his "History of England." But would it, on that account, be judicious in a writer of our times to publish an edition of Hume's "History of England," in which large extracts from Pepys and Mrs. Hutchinson should be incorporated with the original text? Surely not. Hume's "History," be its faults what they may, is now one great entire work, the production of one vigorous mind, working on such materials as were within its reach. Additions made by another hand may supply a particular deficiency, but would grievously injure the general effect. With Boswell's book the case is stronger. There is scarcely, in the whole compass of literature, a book which bears interpolation so ill. We know no production of the human mind which has so much of what may be called the race, so much of the peculiar flavor of the soil from which it sprung. The work could never have been written if the writer had not been precisely what he was. His

character is displayed in every page, and this display of character gives a delightful interest to many passages which have no other interest.

The "Life of Johnson" is assuredly a great, a very great work. Homer is not more decidedly the first of heroic poets, Shakspeare is not more decidedly the first of dramatists, Demosthenes is not more decidedly the first of orators, than Boswell is the first of biographers. He has no second. He has distanced all his competitors so decidedly that it is not worth while to place them. Eclipse is first, and the rest nowhere.

We are not sure that there is in the whole history of the human intellect so strange a phenomenon as this book. Many of the greatest men that ever lived have written biography. Boswell was one of the smallest men that ever lived, and he has beaten them all. He was, if we are to give any credit to his own account, or to the united testimony of all who knew him, a man of the meanest and feeblest intellect. Johnson described him as a fellow who had missed his only chance of immortality by not having been alive when "The Dunciad" was written. Beauclerk used his name as a proverbial expression for a bore. He was the laughing-stock of the whole of that brilliant society which has owed to him the greater part of its fame. He was always laying himself at the feet of some eminent man, and begging to be spit upon and trampled upon. He was always earning some ridiculous nickname, and then "binding it as a crown unto him," not

merely in metaphor, but literally. He exhibited himself at the Shakspeare Jubilee to all the crowd which filled Stratford-on-Avon, with a placard round his hat bearing the inscription of Corsica Boswell. In his "Tour" he proclaimed to all the world that at Edinburgh he was known by the appellation of Paoli Boswell. Servile and impertinent, shallow and pedantic, a bigot and a sot, bloated with family pride, and eternally blustering about the dignity of a born gentleman, yet stooping to be a tale-bearer, an eavesdropper, a common butt in the taverns of London, so curious to know everybody who was talked about, that, Tory and High-churchman as he was, he manœuvred, we have been told, for an introduction to Tom Paine, so vain of the most childish distinctions, that when he had been to court, he drove to the office where his book was printing without changing his clothes, and summoned all the printer's devils to admire his new ruffles and sword; such was this man, and such he was content and proud to be. Everything which another man would have hidden, everything the publication of which would have made another man hang himself, was matter of gay and clamorous exultation to his weak and diseased mind. What silly things he said, what bitter retorts he provoked; how at one place he was troubled with evil presentiments which came to nothing; how at another place, on waking from a drunken doze, he read the Prayer-book and took a hair of the dog that had bitten him; how he went to see men



hanged, and came away maudlin ; how he added five hundred pounds to the fortune of one of his babies because she was not scared at Johnson's ugly face ; how he was frightened out of his wits at sea, and how the sailors quieted him as they would have quieted a child ; how tipsy he was at Lady Cork's one evening, and how much his merriment annoyed the ladies ; how impertinent he was to the Duchess of Argyle, and with what stately contempt she put down his impertinence ; how Colonel Macleod sneered to his face at his impudent obtrusiveness ; how his father and the very wife of his bosom laughed and fretted at his fooleries : all these things he proclaimed to all the world, as if they had been subjects for pride and ostentatious rejoicing. All the caprices of his temper, all the illusions of his vanity, all his hypochondriac whimsies, all his castles in the air, he displayed with a cool self-complacency, a perfect unconsciousness that he was making a fool of himself, to which it is impossible to find a parallel in the whole history of mankind. He has used many people ill ; but assuredly he has used nobody so ill as himself.

That such a man should have written one of the best books in the world is strange enough. But this is not all. Many persons who have conducted themselves foolishly in active life, and whose conversation has indicated no superior powers of mind, have left us valuable works. Goldsmith was very justly described by one of

his contemporaries as an inspired idiot, and by another as a being

“ Who wrote like an angel and talked like poor Poll.”

La Fontaine was in society a mere simpleton. His blunders would not come in amiss among the stories of Hierocles. But these men attained literary eminence in spite of their weaknesses. Boswell attained it by reason of his weaknesses. If he had not been a great fool, he would never have been a great writer. Without all the qualities which made him the jest and the torment of those among whom he lived, without the officiousness, the inquisitiveness, the effrontery, the toad-eating, the insensibility to all reproof, he never could have produced so excellent a book. He was a slave proud of his servitude ; a Paul Pry, convinced that his own curiosity and garrulity were virtues ; an unsafe companion, who never scrupled to repay the most liberal hospitality by the basest violation of confidence ; a man without delicacy, without shame, without sense enough to know when he was hurting the feelings of others, or when he was exposing himself to derision ; and because he was all this, he has, in an important department of literature, immeasurably surpassed such writers as Tacitus, Clarendon, Alfieri, and his own idol Johnson.

Of the talents which ordinarily raise men to eminence as writers, Boswell had absolutely none. There is not in all his books a single remark of his own on literature, politics, relig-

ion, or society, which is not either commonplace or absurd. His dissertations on hereditary gentility, on the slave-trade, and on the entailing of landed estates, may serve as examples. To say that these passages are sophistical would be to pay them an extravagant compliment. They have no pretense to argument, or even to meaning. He has reported innumerable observations made by himself in the course of conversation. Of those observations we do not remember one which is above the intellectual capacity of a boy of fifteen. He has printed many of his own letters, and in these letters he is always ranting or twaddling. Logic, eloquence, wit, taste, all those things which are generally considered as making a book valuable, were utterly wanting to him. He had, indeed, a quick observation and a retentive memory. These qualities, if he had been a man of sense and virtue, would scarcely of themselves have sufficed to make him conspicuous; but, because he was a dunce, a parasite, and a coxcomb, they have made him immortal.

Those parts of his book which, considered abstractedly, are most utterly worthless, are delightful when we read them as illustrations of the character of the writer. Bad in themselves, they are good dramatically, like the nonsense of Justice Shallow, the clipped English of Dr. Caius, or the misplaced consonants of Fluellen. Of all confessors, Boswell is the most candid. Other men who have pretended to lay open their own hearts—Rousseau, for example, and Lord Byron

—have evidently written with a constant view to effect, and are to be then most distrusted when they seem to be most sincere. There is scarcely any man who would not rather accuse himself of great crimes and of dark and tempestuous passions than proclaim all his little vanities and wild fancies. It would be easier to find a person who would avow actions like those of Cæsar Borgia or Danton than one who would publish a day-dream like those of Alnaschar and Malvolio. Those weaknesses which most men keep covered up in the most secret places of the mind, not to be disclosed to the eye of friendship or of love, were precisely the weaknesses which Boswell paraded before all the world. He was perfectly frank, because the weakness of his understanding and the tumult of his spirits prevented him from knowing when he made himself ridiculous. His book resembles nothing so much as the conversation of the inmates of the Palace of Truth.

His fame is great; and it will, we have no doubt, be lasting; but it is fame of a peculiar kind, and indeed marvellously resembles infamy. We remember no other case in which the world has made so great a distinction between a book and its author. In general, the book and the author are considered as one. To admire the book is to admire the author. The case of Boswell is an exception—we think the only exception—to this rule. His work is universally allowed to be interesting, instructive, eminently

original; yet it has brought him nothing but contempt. All the world reads it; all the world delights in it; yet we do not remember ever to have read or ever to have heard any expression of respect and admiration for the man to whom we owe so much instruction and amusement. While edition after edition of his book was coming forth, his son, as Mr. Croker tells us, was ashamed of it, and hated to hear it mentioned. This feeling was natural and reasonable. Sir Alexander saw that in proportion to the celebrity of the work was the degradation of the author. The very editors of this unfortunate gentleman's books have forgotten their allegiance, and, like those Puritan casuists who took arms by the authority of the king against his person, have attacked the writer while doing homage to the writings. Mr. Croker, for example, has published two thousand five hundred notes on the life of Johnson, and yet scarcely ever mentions the biographer whose performance he has taken such pains to illustrate without some expression of contempt.

An ill-natured man Boswell certainly was not. Yet the malignity of the most malignant satirist could scarcely cut deeper than his thoughtless loquacity. Having himself no sensibility to derision and contempt, he took it for granted that all others were equally callous. He was not ashamed to exhibit himself to the whole world as a common spy, a common tattler, a humble companion without the excuse of poverty, and to tell a hundred stories of his own pertness and

folly, and of the insults which his pertness and folly brought upon him. It was natural that he should show little discretion in cases in which the feelings or the honor of others might be concerned. No man, surely, ever published such stories respecting persons whom he professed to love and revere. He would infallibly have made his hero as contemptible as he has made himself, had not his hero really possessed some moral and intellectual qualities of a very high order. The best proof that Johnson was really an extraordinary man is, that his character, instead of being degraded, has, on the whole, been decidedly raised by a work in which all his vices and weaknesses are exposed more unsparingly than they ever were exposed by Churchill or by Kenrick.

Johnson grown old, Johnson in the fulness of his fame and in the enjoyment of a competent fortune, is better known to us than any other man in history. Everything about him, his coat, his wig, his figure, his face, his scrofula, his St.-Vitus's-dance, his rolling walk, his blinking eye, the outward signs which too clearly marked his approbation of his dinner, his insatiable appetite for fish-sauce and veal-pie with plums, his inextinguishable thirst for tea, his trick of touching the posts as he walked, his mysterious practice of treasuring up scraps of orange-peel, his morning slumbers, his midnight disputations, his contortions, his mutterings, his gruntings, his puffings, his vigorous, acute, and ready eloquence, his

sarcastic wit, his vehemence, his insolence, his fits of tempestuous rage, his queer inmates, old Mr. Levett and blind Mrs. Williams, the cat Hodge and the negro Frank—all are as familiar to us as the objects by which we have been surrounded from childhood. But we have no minute information respecting those years of Johnson's life during which his character and his manners became immutably fixed. We know him, not as he was known to the men of his own generation, but as he was known to men whose father he might have been. That celebrated club of which he was the most distinguished member contained few persons who could remember a time when his fame was not fully established and his habits completely formed. He had made himself a name in literature while Reynolds and the Wartons were still boys. He was about twenty years older than Burke, Goldsmith, and Gerard Hamilton, about thirty years older than Gibbon, Beauclerk, and Langton, and about forty years older than Lord Stowell, Sir William Jones, and Windham. Boswell and Mrs. Thrale, the two writers from whom we derive most of our knowledge respecting him, never saw him till long after he was fifty years old, till most of his great works had become classical, and till the pension bestowed on him by the crown had placed him above poverty. Of those eminent men who were his most intimate associates toward the close of his life, the only one, as far as we remember, who knew him during the first ten or twelve years of his residence

in the capital, was David Garrick; and it does not appear that during those years David Garrick saw much of his fellow-townsmen.

Johnson came up to London precisely at the time when the condition of a man of letters was most miserable and degraded. It was a dark night between two sunny days. The age of patronage had passed away. The age of general curiosity and intelligence had not arrived. The number of readers is at present so great that a popular author may subsist in comfort and opulence on the profits of his works. In the reigns of William the Third, of Anne, and of George the First, even such men as Congreve and Addison would scarcely have been able to live like gentlemen by the mere sale of their writings. But the deficiency of the natural demand for literature was, at the close of the seventeenth and at the beginning of the eighteenth century, more than made up by artificial encouragement, by a vast system of bounties and premiums. There was, perhaps, never a time at which the rewards of literary merit were so splendid, at which men who could write well found such easy admittance into the most distinguished society, and to the highest honors of the State. The chiefs of both the great parties into which the kingdom was divided patronized literature with emulous munificence. Congreve, when he had scarcely attained his majority, was rewarded for his first comedy with places which made him independent for life. Smith, though his "Hippolytus" and "Phædra"



failed, would have been consoled with three hundred a year but for his own folly. Rowe was not only poet-laureate, but also land-surveyor of the customs in the port of London, clerk of the council to the Prince of Wales, and secretary of the Presentations to the Lord Chancellor. Hughes was secretary to the Commissions of the Peace. Ambrose Philips was judge of the Prerogative Court in Ireland. Locke was Commissioner of Appeals and of the Board of Trade. Newton was Master of the Mint. Stepney and Prior were employed in embassies of high dignity and importance. Gay, who commenced life as apprentice to a silk-mercier, became a secretary of legation at five-and-twenty. It was to a poem on the Death of Charles the Second, and to the "City and Country Mouse," that Montague owed his introduction into public life, his earldom, his Garter, and his Auditorship of the Exchequer. Swift, but for the unconquerable prejudice of the queen, would have been a bishop. Oxford, with his white staff in his hand, passed through the crowd of his suitors to welcome Parnell, when that ingenious writer deserted the Whigs. Steele was a commissioner of stamps and a Member of Parliament. Arthur Mainwaring was a commissioner of the customs, and auditor of the imprest. Tickell was secretary to the Lords Justices of Ireland. Addison was Secretary of State.

This liberal patronage was brought into fashion, as it seems, by the magnificent Dorset, almost the only noble versifier in the court of Charles

the Second who possessed talents for composition which were independent of the aid of a coronet. Montague owed his elevation to the favor of Dorset, and imitated through the whole course of his life the liberality to which he was himself so greatly indebted. The Tory leaders, Harley and Bolingbroke in particular, vied with the chiefs of the Whig party in zeal for the encouragement of letters. But soon after the accession of the house of Hanover a change took place. The supreme power passed to a man who cared little for poetry or eloquence. The importance of the House of Commons was constantly on the increase. The Government was under the necessity of bartering for parliamentary support much of that patronage which had been employed in fostering literary merit; and Walpole was by no means inclined to divert any part of the fund of corruption to purposes which he considered as idle. He had eminent talents for government and for debate; but he had paid little attention to books, and felt little respect for authors. One of the coarse jokes of his friend, Sir Charles Handbury Williams, was far more pleasing to him than Thomson's "Seasons" or Richardson's "Pamela." He had observed that some of the distinguished writers whom the favor of Halifax had turned into statesmen had been mere encumbrances to their party, dawdlers in office, and mutes in Parliament. During the whole course of his administration, therefore, he scarcely befriended a single man of genius. The best writ-

ers of the age gave all their support to the opposition, and contributed to excite that discontent which, after plunging the nation into a foolish and unjust war, overthrew the minister to make room for men less able and equally immoral. The opposition could reward its eulogists with little more than promises and caresses. St. James's would give nothing; Leicester House had nothing to give.

Thus, at the time when Johnson commenced his literary career, a writer had little to hope from the patronage of powerful individuals. The patronage of the public did not yet furnish the means of comfortable subsistence. The prices paid by booksellers to authors were so low, that a man of considerable talents and unremitting industry could do little more than provide for the day which was passing over him. The lean kine had eaten up the fat kine. The thin and withered ears had devoured the good ears. The season of rich harvests was over, and the period of famine had begun. All that is squalid and miserable might now be summed up in the word Poet. That word denoted a creature dressed like a scarecrow, familiar with compters and spunging-houses, and perfectly qualified to decide on the comparative merits of the Common Side in the King's Bench Prison and of Mount Scoundrel in the Fleet. Even the poorest pitied him; and they well might pity him. For if their condition was equally abject, their aspirings were not equally high, nor their sense of insult equally acute. To lodge in a gar-

ret up four pair of stairs; to dine in a cellar among footmen out of place; to translate ten hours a day for the wages of a ditcher; to be hunted by bailiffs from one haunt of beggary and pestilence to another, from Grub Street to St. George's Fields, and from St. George's Fields to the alleys behind St. Martin's Church; to sleep on a bulk in June, and amidst the ashes of a glass-house in December; to die in a hospital, and to be buried in a parish vault, was the fate of more than one writer who, if he had lived thirty years earlier, would have been admitted to the sittings of the Kit Cat or the Scriblerus Club, would have sat in Parliament, and would have been intrusted with embassies to the High Allies: who, if he had lived in our time, would have found encouragement scarcely less munificent in Albemarle Street or in Paternoster Row.

As every climate has its peculiar diseases, so every walk of life has its peculiar temptations. The literary character, assuredly, has always had its share of faults, vanity, jealousy, morbid sensibility. To these faults were now superadded the faults which are commonly found in men whose livelihood is precarious, and whose principles are exposed to the trial of severe distress. All the vices of the gambler and of the beggar were blended with those of the author. The prizes in the wretched lottery of book-making were scarcely less ruinous than the blanks. If good fortune came, it came in such a manner that it was almost certain to be abused. After months of

starvation and despair, a full third night or a well-received dedication filled the pocket of the lean, ragged, unwashed poet with guineas. He hastened to enjoy those luxuries with the images of which his mind had been haunted while he was sleeping amidst the cinders and eating potatoes at the Irish ordinary in Shoe Lane. A week of taverns soon qualified him for another year of night-cellar. Such was the life of Savage, of Boyse, and of a crowd of others. Sometimes blazing in gold-laced hats and waistcoats; sometimes lying in bed because their coats had gone to pieces, or wearing paper cravats because their linen was in pawn; sometimes drinking champagne and tokay with Betty Careless; sometimes standing at the window of an eating-house in Porridge Island, to snuff up the scent of what they could not afford to taste; they knew luxury; they knew beggary; but they never knew comfort. These men were irreclaimable. They looked on a regular and frugal life with the same aversion which an old gypsy or a Mohawk hunter feels for a stationary abode and for the restraints and securities of civilized communities. They were as untamable, as much wedded to their desolate freedom, as the wild ass. They could no more be broken in to the offices of social man than the unicorn could be trained to serve and abide by the crib. It was well if they did not, like beasts of a still fiercer race, tear the hands which ministered to their necessities. To assist them was impossible; and the most benevolent

of mankind at length became weary of giving relief which was dissipated with the wildest profusion as soon as it had been received. If a sum was bestowed on the wretched adventurer, such as, properly husbanded, might have supplied him for six months, it was instantly spent in strange freaks of sensuality, and, before forty-eight hours had elapsed, the poet was again pestering all his acquaintance for twopence to get a plate of shin of beef at a subterraneous cook-shop. If his friends gave him an asylum in their houses, those houses were forthwith turned into bagnios and taverns. All order was destroyed; all business was suspended. The most good-natured host began to repent of his eagerness to serve a man of genius in distress, when he heard his guest roaring for fresh punch at five o'clock in the morning.

A few eminent writers were more fortunate. Pope had been raised above poverty by the active patronage which, in his youth, both the great political parties had extended to his Homer. Young had received the only pension ever bestowed, to the best of our recollection, by Sir Robert Walpole, as the reward of mere literary merit. One or two of the many poets who attached themselves to the opposition, Thomson in particular, and Mallet, obtained, after much severe suffering, the means of subsistence from their political friends. Richardson, like a man of sense, kept his shop; and his shop kept him, which his novels, admirable as they are, would scarcely have done. But nothing could be more

deplorable than the state even of the ablest men, who at that time depended for subsistence on their writings. Johnson, Collins, Fielding, and Thomson were certainly four of the most distinguished persons that England produced during the eighteenth century. It is well known that they were all four arrested for debt.

Into calamities and difficulties such as these Johnson plunged in his twenty-eighth year. From that time till he was three or four and fifty, we have little information respecting him; little, we mean, compared with the full and accurate information which we possess respecting his proceedings and habits toward the close of his life. He emerged at length from cock-lofts and sixpenny ordinaries into the society of the polished and the opulent. His fame was established. A pension sufficient for his wants had been conferred on him; and he came forth to astonish a generation with which he had almost as little in common as with Frenchmen or Spaniards.

In his early years he had occasionally seen the great; but he had seen them as a beggar. He now came among them as a companion. The demand for amusement and instruction had, during the course of twenty years, been gradually increasing. The price of literary labor had risen; and those rising men of letters with whom Johnson was henceforth to associate were, for the most part, persons widely different from those who had walked about with him all night in the streets for want of a lodging. Burke, Robert-

son, the Wartons, Gray, Mason, Gibbon, Adam Smith, Beattie, Sir William Jones, Goldsmith, and Churchill, were the most distinguished writers of what may be called the second generation of the Johnsonian age. Of these men Churchill was the only one in whom we can trace the stronger lineaments of that character which, when Johnson first came up to London, was common among authors. Of the rest, scarcely any had felt the pressure of severe poverty. Almost all had been early admitted into the most respectable society on an equal footing. They were men of quite a different species from the dependents of Curll and Osborne.

Johnson came among them the solitary specimen of a past age, the last survivor of the genuine race of Grub Street hacks, the last of that generation of authors whose abject misery and whose dissolute manners had furnished inexhaustible matter to the satirical genius of Pope. From nature he had received an uncouth figure, a diseased constitution, and an irritable temper. The manner in which the earlier years of his manhood had been passed had given to his demeanor, and even to his moral character, some peculiarities appalling to the civilized beings who were the companions of his old age. The perverse irregularity of his hours; the slovenliness of his person; his fits of strenuous exertion, interrupted by long intervals of sluggishness; his strange abstinence, and his equally strange voracity; his active benevolence, contrasted with the



constant rudeness and the occasional ferocity of his manners in society—made him, in the opinion of those with whom he lived during the last twenty years of his life, a complete original. An original he was, undoubtedly, in some respects. But if we possessed full information concerning those who shared his early hardships, we should probably find that what we call his singularities of manner were, for the most part, failings which he had in common with the class to which he belonged. He ate at Streatham Park as he had been used to eat behind the screen at St. John's Gate, when he was ashamed to show his ragged clothes. He ate as it was natural that a man should eat, who, during a great part of his life, had passed the morning in doubt whether he should have food for the afternoon. The habits of his early life had accustomed him to bear privation with fortitude, but not to taste pleasure with moderation. He could fast; but, when he did not fast, he tore his dinner like a famished wolf, with the veins swelling on his forehead, and the perspiration running down his cheeks. He scarcely ever took wine. But when he drank it, he drank it greedily and in large tumblers. These were, in fact, mitigated symptoms of that same moral disease which raged with such deadly malignity in his friends Savage and Boyse. The roughness and violence which he showed in society were to be expected from a man whose temper, not naturally gentle, had been long tried by the bitterest calamities; by the want of meat,

of fire, and of clothes; by the importunity of creditors; by the insolence of booksellers; by the derision of fools; by the insincerity of patrons; by that bread which is the bitterest of all food; by those stairs which are the most toilsome of all paths; by that deferred hope which makes the heart sick. Through all these things the ill-dressed, coarse, ungainly pedant had struggled manfully up to eminence and command. It was natural that, in the exercise of his power, he should be "*eo immitior, quia toleraverat*," that, though his heart was undoubtedly generous and humane, his demeanor in society should be harsh and despotic. For severe distress he had sympathy, and not only sympathy, but munificent relief. But for the suffering which a harsh word inflicts upon a delicate mind he had no pity, for it was a kind of suffering which he could scarcely conceive. He would carry home on his shoulders a sick and starving girl from the streets. He turned his house into a place of refuge for a crowd of wretched old creatures who could find no other asylum; nor could all their peevishness and ingratitude weary out his benevolence. But the pangs of wounded vanity seemed to him ridiculous; and he scarcely felt sufficient compassion even for the pangs of wounded affection. He had seen and felt so much of sharp misery that he was not affected by paltry vexations: and he seemed to think that everybody ought to be as much hardened to those vexations as himself. He was angry with Boswell for complaining of a

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headache, with Mrs. Thrale for grumbling about the dust on the road, or the smell of the kitchen. These were, in his phrase, "foppish lamentations," which people ought to be ashamed to utter in a world so full of sin and sorrow. Goldsmith crying because "The Good-natured Man" had failed, inspired him with no pity. Though his own health was not good, he detested and despised valetudinarians. Pecuniary losses, unless they reduced the loser absolutely to beggary, moved him very little. People whose hearts had been softened by prosperity might weep, he said, for such events; but all that could be expected of a plain man was not to laugh. He was not much moved even by the spectacle of Lady Tavistock dying of a broken heart for the loss of her lord. Such grief he considered as a luxury reserved for the idle and the wealthy. A washerwoman, left a widow with nine small children, would not have sobbed herself to death.

A person who troubled himself so little about small or sentimental grievances was not likely to be very attentive to the feelings of others in the ordinary intercourse of society. He could not understand how a sarcasm or a reprimand could make any man really unhappy. "My dear doctor," said he to Goldsmith, "what harm does it do to a man to call him Holofernes?" "Pooh, ma'am," he exclaimed to Mrs. Carter, "who is the worse for being talked of uncharitably?" Politeness has been well defined as benevolence in small things. Johnson was impolite, not because

he wanted benevolence, but because small things appeared smaller to him than to people who had never known what it was to live for fourpence-halfpenny a day.

The characteristic peculiarity of his intellect was the union of great powers with low prejudices. If we judged of him by the best parts of his mind, we should place him almost as high as he was placed by the idolatry of Boswell; if by the worst parts of his mind, we should place him even below Boswell himself. Where he was not under the influence of some strange scruple, or some domineering passion, which prevented him from boldly and fairly investigating a subject, he was a wary and acute reasoner, a little too much inclined to scepticism, and a little too fond of paradox. No man was less likely to be imposed upon by fallacies in argument or by exaggerated statements of fact. But if, while he was beating down sophisms and exposing false testimony, some childish prejudices, such as would excite laughter in a well-managed nursery, came across him, he was smitten as if by enchantment. His mind dwindled away under the spell from gigantic elevation to dwarfish littleness. Those who had lately been admiring its amplitude and its force were now as much astonished at its strange narrowness and feebleness as the fisherman in the Arabian tale, when he saw the Genius, whose stature had overshadowed the whole sea-coast, and whose might seemed equal to a contest with armies, contract him-

self to the dimensions of his small prison, and lie there the helpless slave of the charm of Solomon.

Johnson was in the habit of sifting with extreme severity the evidence for all stories which were merely odd. But when they were not only odd but miraculous, his severity relaxed. He began to be credulous precisely at the point where the most credulous people begin to be sceptical. It is curious to observe, both in his writings and in his conversation, the contrast between the disdainful manner in which he rejects unauthenticated anecdotes, even when they are consistent with the general laws of nature, and the respectful manner in which he mentions the wildest stories relating to the invisible world. A man who told him of a water-spout or a meteoric stone generally had the lie direct given him for his pains. A man who told him of a prediction or a dream wonderfully accomplished was sure of a courteous hearing. "Johnson," observed Hogarth, "like King David, says, in his haste, that all men are liars." "His incredulity," says Mrs. Thrale, "amounted almost to disease." She tells us how he browbeat a gentleman who gave him an account of a hurricane in the West Indies, and a poor Quaker who related some strange circumstance about the red-hot balls fired at the siege of Gibraltar. "It is not so. It cannot be true. Don't tell that story again. You cannot think how poor a figure you make in telling it." He once said, half jestingly we suppose, that for

six months he refused to credit the fact of the earthquake at Lisbon, and that he still believed the extent of the calamity to be greatly exaggerated. Yet he related with a grave face how old Mr. Cave, of St. John's Gate, saw a ghost, and how this ghost was something of a shadowy being. He went himself on a ghost-hunt to Cock Lane, and was angry with John Wesley for not following up another scent of the same kind with proper spirit and perseverance. He rejects the Celtic genealogies and poems without the least hesitation; yet he declares himself willing to believe the stories of the second-sight. If he had examined the claims of the Highland seers with half the severity with which he sifted the evidence for the genuineness of "Fingal," he would, we suspect, have come away from Scotland with a mind fully made up. In his "Lives of the Poets," we find that he is unwilling to give credit to the accounts of Lord Roscommon's early proficiency in his studies; but he tells with great solemnity an absurd romance about some intelligence preternaturally impressed on the mind of that nobleman. He avows himself to be in great doubt about the truth of the story, and ends by warning his readers not wholly to slight such impressions.

Many of his sentiments on religious subjects are worthy of a liberal and enlarged mind. He could discern clearly enough the folly and meanness of all bigotry except his own. When he spoke of the scruples of the Puritans, he spoke

like a person who had really obtained an insight into the divine philosophy of the New Testament, and who considered Christianity as a noble scheme of government, tending to promote the happiness and to elevate the moral nature of man. The horror which the sectaries felt for cards, Christmas ale, plum-porridge, mince-pies, and dancing bears, excited his contempt. To the arguments urged by some very worthy people against showy dress he replied with admirable sense and spirit, "Let us not be found, when our Master calls us, stripping the lace off our waistcoats, but the spirit of contention from our souls and tongues. Alas! sir, a man who cannot get to heaven in a green coat will not find his way thither the sooner in a gray one." Yet he was himself under the tyranny of scruples as unreasonable as those of Hudibras or Ralpho, and carried his zeal for ceremonies and for ecclesiastical dignities to lengths altogether inconsistent with reason or with Christian charity. He has gravely noted down in his diary that he once committed the sin of drinking coffee on Good-Friday. In Scotland, he thought it his duty to pass several months without joining in public worship, solely because the ministers of the kirk had not been ordained by bishops. His mode of estimating the piety of his neighbors was somewhat singular. "Campbell," said he, "is a good man, a pious man. I am afraid he has not been in the inside of a church for many years; but he never passes a church without pulling off his

hat: this shows he has good principles." Spain and Sicily must surely contain many pious robbers and well-principled assassins. Johnson could easily see that a Roundhead who named all his children after Solomon's singers, and talked in the House of Commons about seeking the Lord, might be an unprincipled villain whose religious mummeries only aggravated his guilt. But a man who took off his hat when he passed a church episcopally consecrated must be a good man, a pious man, a man of good principles. Johnson could easily see that those persons who looked on a dance or a laced waistcoat as sinful, deemed most ignobly of the attributes of God and of the ends of revelation. But with what a storm of invective he would have overwhelmed any man who had blamed him for celebrating the redemption of mankind with sugarless tea and butterless buns!

Nobody spoke more contemptuously of the cant of patriotism. Nobody saw more clearly the error of those who regarded liberty, not as a means, but as an end, and who proposed to themselves, as the object of their pursuit, the prosperity of the State as distinct from the prosperity of the individuals who compose the State. His calm and settled opinion seems to have been that forms of government have little or no influence on the happiness of society. This opinion, erroneous as it is, ought at least to have preserved him from all intemperance on political questions. It did not, however, preserve him



from the lowest, fiercest, and most absurd extravagances of party spirit, from rants which, in everything but the diction, resembled those of Squire Western. He was, as a politician, half ice and half fire. On the side of his intellect he was a mere Pococurante, far too apathetic about public affairs, far too sceptical as to the good or evil tendency of any form of polity. His passions, on the contrary, were violent even to slaying against all who leaned to Whiggish principles. The well-known lines which he inserted in Goldsmith's "Traveller" express what seems to have been his deliberate judgment :

"How small of all that human hearts endure,  
That part which kings or laws can cause or cure !"

He had previously put expressions very similar into the mouth of Rasselas. It is amusing to contrast these passages with the torrents of rav-ing abuse which he poured forth against the Long Parliament and the American Congress. In one of the conversations reported by Boswell this inconsistency displays itself in the most ludicrous manner.

"Sir Adam Ferguson," says Boswell, "suggested that luxury corrupts a people, and destroys the spirit of liberty. JOHNSON: 'Sir, that is all visionary. I would not give half a guinea to live under one form of government rather than another. It is of no moment to the happiness of an individual. Sir, the danger of the abuse of power is nothing to a private man. What French-

man is prevented passing his life as he pleases ?  
SIR ADAM : ' But, sir, in the British constitution it is surely of importance to keep up a spirit in the people, so as to preserve a balance against the crown.' JOHNSON : ' Sir, I perceive you are a vile Whig. Why all this childish jealousy of the power of the crown ? The crown has not power enough.' "

One of the old philosophers, Lord Bacon tells us, used to say that life and death were just the same to him. " Why, then," said an objector, " do you not kill yourself ?" The philosopher answered, " Because it is just the same." If the difference between two forms of government be not worth half a guinea, it is not easy to see how Whiggism can be viler than Toryism, or how the crown can have too little power. If the happiness of individuals is not affected by political abuses, zeal for liberty is doubtless ridiculous. But zeal for monarchy must be equally so. No person could have been more quick-sighted than Johnson to such a contradiction as this in the logic of an antagonist.

The judgments which Johnson passed on books were, in his own time, regarded with superstitious veneration, and, in our time, are generally treated with indiscriminate contempt. They are the judgments of a strong but enslaved understanding. The mind of the critic was hedged round by an uninterrupted fence of prejudices and superstitions. Within his narrow limits, he displayed a vigor and an activity which ought to have

enabled him to clear the barrier that confined him.

How it chanced that a man who reasoned on his premises so ably, should assume his premises so foolishly, is one of the great mysteries of human nature. The same inconsistency may be observed in the schoolmen of the Middle Ages. Those writers show so much acuteness and force of mind in arguing on their wretched data, that a modern reader is perpetually at a loss to comprehend how such minds came by such data. Not a flaw in the superstructure of the theory which they are rearing escapes their vigilance. Yet they are blind to the obvious unsoundness of the foundation. It is the same with some eminent lawyers. Their legal arguments are intellectual prodigies, abounding with the happiest analogies and the most refined distinctions. The principles of their arbitrary science being once admitted, the statute-book and the reports being once assumed as the foundations of reasoning, these men must be allowed to be perfect masters of logic. But if a question arises as to the postulates on which their whole system rests, if they are called upon to vindicate the fundamental maxims of that system which they have passed their lives in studying, these very men often talk the language of savages or of children. Those who have listened to a man of this class in his own court, and who have witnessed the skill with which he analyzes and digests a vast mass of evidence, or reconciles a crowd of precedents which

at first sight seem contradictory, scarcely know him again when, a few hours later, they hear him speaking on the other side of Westminster Hall in his capacity of legislator. They can scarcely believe that the paltry quirks which are faintly heard through a storm of coughing, and which do not impose on the plainest country gentleman, can proceed from the same sharp and vigorous intellect which had excited their admiration under the same roof, and on the same day.

Johnson decided literary questions like a lawyer, not like a legislator. He never examined foundations where a point was already ruled. His whole code of criticism rested on pure assumption, for which he sometimes quoted a precedent or an authority, but rarely troubled himself to give a reason drawn from the nature of things. He took it for granted that the kind of poetry which flourished in his own time, which he had been accustomed to hear praised from his childhood, and which he had himself written with success, was the best kind of poetry. In his biographical work he has repeatedly laid it down as an undeniable proposition that during the latter part of the seventeenth century, and the earlier part of the eighteenth, English poetry had been in a constant progress of improvement. Waller, Denham, Dryden, and Pope, had been, according to him, the great reformers. He judged of all works of the imagination by the standard established among his own contemporaries. Though he allowed Homer to have been a greater man

than Virgil, he seems to have thought the "Æneid" a greater poem than the "Iliad." Indeed, he well might have thought so; for he preferred Pope's "Iliad" to Homer's. He pronounced that, after Hoole's translation of Tasso, Fairfax's would hardly be reprinted. He could see no merit in our fine old English ballads, and always spoke with the most provoking contempt of Percy's fondness for them. Of the great original works of imagination which appeared during his time, Richardson's novels alone excited his admiration. He could see little or no merit in "Tom Jones," in "Gulliver's Travels," or in "Tristram Shandy." To Thomson's "Castle of Indolence" he vouchsafed only a line of cold commendation—of commendation much colder than what he has bestowed on the "Creation" of that portentous bore, Sir Richard Blackmore. Gray was, in his dialect, a barren rascal; Churchill was a block-head. The contempt which he felt for the trash of Macpherson was indeed just; but it was, we suspect, just by chance. He despised the "Fingal" for the very reason which led many men of genius to admire it. He despised it, not because it was essentially commonplace, but because it had a superficial air of originality.

He was undoubtedly an excellent judge of compositions fashioned on his own principles. But when a deeper philosophy was required, when he undertook to pronounce judgment on the works of those great minds which "yield homage only to eternal laws," his failure was ignominious. He

criticised Pope's "Epitaphs" excellently. But his observations on Shakspeare's plays and Milton's poems seem to us, for the most part, as wretched as if they had been written by Rymer himself, whom we take to have been the worst critic that ever lived.

Some of Johnson's whims on literary subjects can be compared only to that strange nervous feeling which made him uneasy if he had not touched every post between the Mitre tavern and his own lodgings. His preference of Latin epitaphs to English epitaphs is an instance. An English epitaph, he said, would disgrace Smollett. He declared that he would not pollute the walls of Westminster Abbey with an English epitaph on Goldsmith. What reason there can be for celebrating a British writer in Latin, which there was not for covering the Roman arches of triumph with Greek inscriptions, or for commemorating the deeds of the heroes of Thermopylæ in Egyptian hieroglyphics, we are utterly unable to imagine.

On men and manners, at least on the men and manners of a particular place and a particular age, Johnson had certainly looked with a most observant and discriminating eye. His remarks on the education of children, on marriage, on the economy of families, on the rules of society, are always striking, and generally sound. In his writings, indeed, the knowledge of life which he possessed in an eminent degree is very imperfectly exhibited. Like those unfortunate chiefs of

the Middle Ages who were suffocated by their own chain-mail and cloth of gold, his maxims perish under that load of words which was designed for their defense and their ornament. But it is clear, from the remains of his conversation, that he had more of that homely wisdom which nothing but experience and observation can give than any writer since the time of Swift. If he had been content to write as he talked, he might have left books on the practical art of living superior to the "Directions to Servants."

Yet even his remarks on society, like his remarks on literature, indicate a mind at least as remarkable for narrowness as for strength. He was no master of the great science of human nature. He had studied, not the genus man, but the species Londoner. Nobody was ever so thoroughly conversant with all the forms of life and all the shades of moral and intellectual character which were to be seen from Islington to the Thames, and from Hyde Park Corner to Mile-end Green. But his philosophy stopped at the first turnpike-gate. Of the rural life of England he knew nothing; and he took it for granted that everybody who lived in the country was either stupid or miserable. "Country gentlemen," said he, "must be unhappy; for they have not enough to keep their lives in motion;" as if all those peculiar habits and associations which made Fleet Street and Charing Cross the finest views in the world to himself had been essential parts of human nature. Of remote countries and past times

he talked with wild and ignorant presumption. "The Athenians of the age of Demosthenes," he said to Mrs. Thrale, "were a people of brutes, a barbarous people." In conversation with Sir Adam Ferguson he used similar language. "The boasted Athenians," he said, "were barbarians. The mass of every people must be barbarous where there is no printing." The fact was this: he saw that a Londoner who could not read was a very stupid and brutal fellow; he saw that great refinement of taste and activity of intellect were rarely found in a Londoner who had not read much; and, because it was by means of books that people acquired almost all their knowledge in the society with which he was acquainted, he concluded, in defiance of the strongest and clearest evidence, that the human mind can be cultivated by means of books alone. An Athenian citizen might possess very few volumes; and the largest library to which he had access might be much less valuable than Johnson's bookcase in Bolt Court. But the Athenian might pass every morning in conversation with Socrates, and might hear Pericles speak four or five times every month. He saw the plays of Sophocles and Aristophanes: he walked amidst the friezes of Phidias and the paintings of Zeuxis: he knew by heart the choruses of Æschylus: he heard the rhapsodist at the corner of the street reciting the "Shield of Achilles" or the "Death of Argus:" he was a legislator, conversant with high questions of alliance, revenue, and war: he was a sol-



dier, trained under a liberal and generous discipline: he was a judge, compelled every day to weigh the effect of opposite arguments. These things were in themselves an education—an education eminently fitted, not, indeed, to form exact or profound thinkers, but to give quickness to the perceptions, delicacy to the taste, fluency to the expression, and politeness to the manners. All this was overlooked. An Athenian who did not improve his mind by reading was, in Johnson's opinion, much such a person as a Cockney who made his mark, much such a person as black Frank before he went to school, and far inferior to a parish clerk or a printer's devil.

Johnson's friends have allowed that he carried to a ridiculous extreme his unjust contempt for foreigners. He pronounced the French to be a very silly people, much behind us, stupid, ignorant creatures. And this judgment he formed after having been at Paris about a month, during which he would not talk French, for fear of giving the natives an advantage over him in conversation. He pronounced them also to be an indelicate people, because a French footman touched the sugar with his fingers. That ingenious and amusing traveller, M. Simond, has defended his countrymen very successfully against Johnson's accusation, and has pointed out some English practices which, to an impartial spectator, would seem at least as inconsistent with physical cleanliness and social decorum as those which Johnson so bitterly reprehended. To the sage,

as Boswell loves to call him, it never occurred to doubt that there must be something eternally and immutably good in the usages to which he had been accustomed. In fact, Johnson's remarks on society beyond the bills of mortality are generally of much the same kind with those of honest Tom Dawson, the English footman in Dr. Moore's "Zeluco." "Suppose the King of France has no sons, but only a daughter, then, when the king dies, this here daughter, according to that there law, cannot be made queen, but the next near relative, provided he is a man, is made king, and not the last king's daughter, which, to be sure, is very unjust. The French foot-guards are dressed in blue, and all the marching regiments in white, which has a very foolish appearance for soldiers; and as for blue regimentals, it is only fit for the blue horse or the artillery."

Johnson's visit to the Hebrides introduced him to a state of society completely new to him; and a salutary suspicion of his own deficiencies seems on that occasion to have crossed his mind for the first time. He confessed, in the last paragraph of his "Journey," that his thoughts on national manners were the thoughts of one who had seen but little, of one who had passed his time almost wholly in cities. This feeling, however, soon passed away. It is remarkable that to the last he entertained a fixed contempt for all those modes of life and those studies which tend to emancipate the mind from the prejudices of a particular age or a particular nation. Of foreign

travel and of history he spoke with the fierce and boisterous contempt of ignorance. "What does a man learn by travelling? Is Beauclerk the better for travelling? What did Lord Charlemont learn in his travels, except that there was a snake in one of the pyramids of Egypt?" History was, in his opinion, to use the fine expression of Lord Plunkett, an old almanac: historians could, as he conceived, claim no higher dignity than that of almanac-makers; and his favorite historians were those who, like Lord Hailes, aspired to no higher dignity. He always spoke with contempt of Robertson. Hume he would not even read. He affronted one of his friends for talking to him about Catiline's conspiracy, and declared that he never desired to hear of the Punic war again as long as he lived.

Assuredly one fact which does not directly affect our own interests, considered in itself, is no better worth knowing than another fact. The fact that there is a snake in a pyramid, or the fact that Hannibal crossed the Alps, are in themselves as unprofitable to us as the fact that there is a green blind in a particular house in Threadneedle Street, or the fact that a Mr. Smith comes into the City every morning on the top of one of the Blackwall stages. But it is certain that those who will not crack the shell of history will never get at the kernel. Johnson, with hasty arrogance, pronounced the kernel worthless, because he saw no value in the shell. The real use of travelling to distant countries, and of studying

the annals of past times, is to preserve men from the contraction of mind which those can hardly escape whose whole communion is with one generation and one neighborhood, who arrive at conclusions by means of an induction not sufficiently copious, and who therefore constantly confound exceptions with rules, and accidents with essential properties. In short, the real use of travelling and of studying history is to keep men from being what Tom Dawson was in fiction, and Samuel Johnson in reality.

Johnson, as Mr. Burke most justly observed, appears far greater in Boswell's books than in his own. His conversation appears to have been quite equal to his writings in matter, and far superior to them in manner. When he talked, he clothed his wit and his sense in forcible and natural expressions. As soon as he took his pen in his hand to write for the public, his style became systematically vicious. All his books are written in a learned language; in a language which nobody hears from his mother or his nurse; in a language in which nobody ever quarrels, or drives bargains, or makes love; in a language in which nobody ever thinks. It is clear that Johnson himself did not think in the dialect in which he wrote. The expressions which came first to his tongue were simple, energetic, and picturesque. When he wrote for publication, he did his sentences out of English into Johnsonese. His letters from the Hebrides to Mrs. Thrale are the original of that work of which the "Journey to the Hebri-

des" is the translation; and it is amusing to compare the two versions. "When we were taken up-stairs," says he, in one of his letters, "a dirty fellow bounced out of the bed on which one of us was to lie." This incident is recorded in the "Journey" as follows: "Out of one of the beds on which we were to repose, started up, at our entrance, a man black as a Cyclops from the forge." Sometimes Johnson translated aloud. "'The Rehearsal,'" he said, very unjustly, "has not wit enough to keep it sweet;" then, after a pause, "it has not vitality enough to preserve it from putrefaction."

Mannerism is pardonable, and is sometimes even agreeable, when the manner, though vicious, is natural. Few readers, for example, would be willing to part with the mannerism of Milton or of Burke. But a mannerism which does not sit easy on the mannerist, which has been adopted on principle, and which can be sustained only by constant effort, is always offensive. And such is the mannerism of Johnson.

The characteristic faults of his style are so familiar to all our readers, and have been so often burlesqued, that it is almost superfluous to point them out. It is well known that he made less use than any other eminent writer of those strong plain words, Anglo-Saxon or Norman-French, of which the roots lie in the inmost depths of our language; and that he felt a vicious partiality for terms which, long after our own speech had been fixed, were borrowed from the Greek and

Latin, and which therefore, even when lawfully naturalized, must be considered as born aliens, not entitled to rank with the king's English. His constant practice of padding out a sentence with useless epithets, till it became as stiff as the bust of an exquisite; his antithetical forms of expression, constantly employed even where there is no opposition in the ideas expressed; his big words wasted on little things; his harsh inversions, so widely different from those graceful and easy inversions which give variety, spirit, and sweetness to the expression of our great old writers—all these peculiarities have been imitated by his admirers and parodied by his assailants, till the public has become sick of the subject.

Goldsmith said to him, very wittily and very justly, "If you were to write a fable about little fishes, doctor, you would make the little fishes talk like whales." No man surely ever had so little talent for personation as Johnson. Whether he wrote in the character of a disappointed legacy-hunter or an empty town fop, of a crazy virtuoso or a flippant coquette, he wrote in the same pompous and unbending style. His speech, like Sir Piercy Shafton's euphuistic eloquence, bewrayed him under every disguise. Euphelia and Rhodoclea talk as finely as Imlac the poet, or Seged, Emperor of Ethiopia. The gay Cornelia describes her reception at the country-house of her relations in such terms as these: "I was surprised, after the civilities of my first

reception, to find, instead of the leisure and tranquillity which a rural life always promises, and, if well conducted, might always afford, a confused wildness of care, and a tumultuous hurry of diligence, by which every face was clouded, and every motion agitated." The gentle Tranquilla informs us that she "had not passed the earlier part of life without the flattery of courtship and the joys of triumph; but had danced the round of gayety amidst the murmurs of envy and the gratulations of applause, had been attended from pleasure to pleasure by the great, the sprightly, and the vain, and had seen her regard solicited by the obsequiousness of gallantry, the gayety of wit, and the timidity of love." Surely Sir John Falstaff himself did not wear his petticoats with a worse grace. The reader may well cry out, with honest Sir Hugh Evans, "I like not when a 'oman has a great peard: I spy a great peard under her muffler."\*

We had something more to say. But our article is already too long; and we must close it. We would fain part in good humor from the hero, from the biographer, and even from the editor, who, ill as he has performed his task, has at least this claim to our gratitude, that he has induced us to read Boswell's book again. As we close it, the club-room is before us, and the table

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\* It is proper to observe that this passage bears a very close resemblance to a passage in *The Rambler* (No. 20). The resemblance may possibly be the effect of unconscious plagiarism.

on which stands the omelet for Nugent, and the lemons for Johnson. There are assembled those heads which live forever on the canvas of Reynolds. There are the spectacles of Burke and the tall thin form of Langton, the courtly sneer of Beauclerk, and the beaming smile of Garrick, Gibbon tapping his snuffbox, and Sir Joshua with his trumpet in his ear. In the foreground is that strange figure which is as familiar to us as the figures of those among whom we have been brought up, the gigantic body, the huge massy face seamed with the scars of disease, the brown coat, the black worsted stockings, the gray wig with the scorched foretop, the dirty hands, the nails bitten and pared to the quick. We see the eyes and mouth moving with convulsive twitches; we see the heavy form rolling; we hear it puffing; and then comes the "Why, sir?" and the "What then, sir?" and the "No, sir!" and the "You don't see your way through the question, sir!"

What a singular destiny has been that of this remarkable man! To be regarded in his own age as a classic, and in ours as a companion! To receive from his contemporaries that full homage which men of genius have in general received only from posterity! To be more intimately known to posterity than other men are known to their contemporaries! That kind of fame which is commonly the most transient is, in his case, the most durable. The reputation of those writings which he probably expected to be immortal



is every day fading ; while those peculiarities of manner and that careless table-talk, the memory of which, he probably thought, would die with him, are likely to be remembered as long as the English language is spoken in any quarter of the globe.



## SAMUEL JOHNSON.

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SAMUEL JOHNSON, one of the most eminent English writers of the eighteenth century, was the son of Michael Johnson, who was, at the beginning of that century, a magistrate of Lichfield, and a bookseller of great note in the Midland Counties. Michael's abilities and attainments seem to have been considerable. He was so well acquainted with the contents of the volumes which he exposed to sale, that the country rectors of Staffordshire and Worcestershire thought him an oracle on points of learning. Between him and the clergy, indeed, there was a strong religious and political sympathy. He was a zealous Churchman, and, though he qualified himself for municipal office by taking the oaths to the sovereigns in possession, was to the last a Jacobite in heart. At his house—a house which is still pointed out to every traveller who visits Lichfield—Samuel was born on the 18th of September, 1709. In the child the physical, intellectual, and moral peculiarities which afterward distinguished the man were plainly discernible; great muscular

strength, accompanied by much awkwardness and many infirmities; great quickness of parts, with a morbid propensity to sloth and procrastination; a kind and generous heart, with a gloomy and irritable temper. He had inherited from his ancestors a scrofulous taint, which it was beyond the power of medicine to remove. His parents were weak enough to believe that the royal touch was a specific for this malady. In his third year he was taken up to London, inspected by the court surgeon, prayed over by the court chaplains, and stroked and presented with a piece of gold by Queen Anne. One of his earliest recollections was that of a stately lady in a diamond stomacher and a long black hood. Her hand was applied in vain. The boy's features, which were originally noble and not irregular, were distorted by his malady. His cheeks were deeply scarred. He lost for a time the sight of one eye, and he saw but very imperfectly with the other. But the force of his mind overcame every impediment. Indolent as he was, he acquired knowledge with such ease and rapidity that at every school to which he was sent he was soon the best scholar. From sixteen to eighteen he resided at home, and was left to his own devices. He learned much at this time, though his studies were without guidance and without plan. He ransacked his father's shelves, dipped into a multitude of books, read what was interesting, and passed over what was dull. An ordinary lad would have acquired little or no useful knowledge in such a way; but

much that was dull to ordinary lads was interesting to Samuel. He read little Greek; for his proficiency in that language was not such that he could take much pleasure in the masters of Attic poetry and eloquence. But he had left school a good Latinist, and he soon acquired, in the large and miscellaneous library of which he now had the command, an extensive knowledge of Latin literature. That Augustan delicacy of taste, which is the boast of the great public schools of England, he never possessed. But he was early familiar with some classical writers, who were quite unknown to the best scholars in the sixth form at Eton. He was peculiarly attracted by the works of the great restorers of learning. Once, while searching for some apples, he found a huge folio volume of Petrarch's works. The name excited his curiosity, and he eagerly devoured hundreds of pages. Indeed, the diction and versification of his own Latin compositions show that he had paid at least as much attention to modern copies from the antique as to the original models.

While he was thus irregularly educating himself, his family was sinking into hopeless poverty. Old Michael Johnson was much better qualified to pore upon books, and to talk about them, than to trade in them. His business declined; his debts increased; it was with difficulty that the daily expenses of his household were defrayed. It was out of his power to support his son at either university; but a wealthy neighbor

offered assistance, and, in reliance on promises which proved to be of very little value, Samuel was entered at Pembroke College, Oxford. When the young scholar presented himself to the rulers of that society, they were amazed not more by his ungainly figure and eccentric manners than by the quantity of extensive and curious information which he had picked up during many months of desultory, but not unprofitable, study. On the first day of his residence he surprised his teachers by quoting Macrobius; and one of the most learned among them declared that he had never known a freshman of equal attainments.

At Oxford, Johnson resided during about three years. He was poor, even to raggedness; and his appearance excited a mirth and a pity which were equally intolerable to his haughty spirit. He was driven from the quadrangle of Christ Church by the sneering looks which the members of that aristocratical society cast at the holes in his shoes. Some charitable person placed a new pair at his door, but he spurned them away in a fury. Distress made him, not servile, but reckless and ungovernable. No opulent gentleman commoner, panting for one-and-twenty, could have treated the academical authorities with more gross disrespect. The needy scholar was generally to be seen under the gate of Pembroke, a gate now adorned with his effigy, haranguing a circle of lads, over whom, in spite of his tattered gown and dirty linen, his wit and audacity gave him an undisputed ascendancy. In every mutiny

against the discipline of the college he was the ringleader. Much was pardoned, however, to a youth so highly distinguished by abilities and acquirements. He had early made himself known by turning Pope's "Messiah" into Latin verse. The style and rhythm, indeed, were not exactly Virgilian, but the translation found many admirers, and was read with pleasure by Pope himself.

The time drew near at which Johnson would, in the ordinary course of things, have become a Bachelor of Arts, but he was at the end of his resources. Those promises of support on which he had relied had not been kept. His family could do nothing for him. His debts to Oxford tradesmen were small indeed, yet larger than he could pay. In the autumn of 1731 he was under the necessity of quitting the university without a degree. In the following winter his father died. The old man left but a pittance, and of that pittance almost the whole was appropriated to the support of his widow. The property to which Samuel succeeded amounted to no more than twenty pounds.

His life, during the thirty years which followed, was one hard struggle with poverty. The misery of that struggle needed no aggravation, but was aggravated by the sufferings of an unsound body and an unsound mind. Before the young man left the university, his hereditary malady had broken forth in a singularly cruel form. He had become an incurable hypochondriac. He said long after that he had been mad all his life, or



at least not perfectly sane ; and, in truth, eccentricities less strange than his have often been thought grounds sufficient for absolving felons, and for setting aside wills. His grimaces, his gestures, his mutterings, sometimes diverted and sometimes terrified people who did not know him. At a dinner-table he would, in a fit of absence, stoop down and twitch off a lady's shoe. He would amaze a drawing-room by suddenly ejaculating a clause of the Lord's Prayer. He would conceive an unintelligible aversion to a particular alley, and perform a great circuit rather than see the hateful place. He would set his heart on touching every post in the streets through which he walked. If by any chance he missed a post, he would go back a hundred yards and repair the omission. Under the influence of his disease, his senses became morbidly torpid and his imagination morbidly active. At one time he would stand poring on the town-clock without being able to tell the hour. At another, he would distinctly hear his mother, who was many miles off, calling him by his name. But this was not the worst. A deep melancholy took possession of him, and gave a dark tinge to all his views of human nature and of human destiny. Such wretchedness as he endured has driven many men to shoot themselves or drown themselves ; but he was under no temptation to commit suicide. He was sick of life, but he was afraid of death ; and he shuddered at every sight or sound which reminded him of the inevitable hour. In



religion he found but little comfort during his long and frequent fits of dejection, for his religion partook of his own character. The light from heaven shone on him indeed, but not in a direct line, or with its own pure splendor. The rays had to struggle through a disturbing medium; they reached him refracted, dulled, and discolored by the thick gloom which had settled on his soul; and, though they might be sufficiently clear to guide him, were too dim to cheer him.

With such infirmities of body and of mind, this celebrated man was left, at two-and-twenty, to fight his way through the world. He remained during about five years in the Midland Counties. At Lichfield, his birthplace and his early home, he had inherited some friends and acquired others. He was kindly noticed by Henry Hervey, a gay officer of noble family, who happened to be quartered there. Gilbert Walmesley, registrar of the ecclesiastical court of the diocese, a man of distinguished parts, learning, and knowledge of the world, did himself honor by patronizing the young adventurer, whose repulsive person, unpolished manners, and squalid garb moved many of the petty aristocracy of the neighborhood to laughter or to disgust. At Lichfield, however, Johnson could find no way of earning a livelihood. He became usher of a grammar-school in Leicestershire; he resided as a humble companion in the house of a country gentleman; but a life of dependence was insupportable to his haughty spirit. He repaired to Birmingham, and there

earned a few guineas by literary drudgery. In that town he printed a translation, little noticed at the time, and long forgotten, of a Latin book about Abyssinia. He then put forth proposals for publishing by subscription the poems of Politian, with notes containing a history of modern Latin verse ; but subscriptions did not come in, and the volume never appeared.

While leading this vagrant and miserable life, Johnson fell in love. The object of his passion was Mrs. Elizabeth Porter, a widow who had children as old as himself. To ordinary spectators, the lady appeared to be a short, fat, coarse woman, painted half an inch thick, dressed in gaudy colors, and fond of exhibiting provincial airs and graces which were not exactly those of the Queensberrys and Lepels. To Johnson, however, whose passions were strong, whose eyesight was too weak to distinguish ceruse from natural bloom, and who had seldom or never been in the same room with a woman of real fashion, his Titty, as he called her, was the most beautiful, graceful, and accomplished of her sex. That his admiration was unfeigned cannot be doubted, for she was as poor as himself. She accepted, with a readiness which did her little honor, the addresses of a suitor who might have been her son. The marriage, however, in spite of occasional wranglings, proved happier than might have been expected. The lover continued to be under the illusions of the wedding-day till the lady died in her sixty-fourth year. On her

monument he placed an inscription, extolling the charms of her person and of her manners ; and when, long after her decease, he had occasion to mention her, he exclaimed, with a tenderness half ludicrous, half pathetic, " Pretty creature !"

His marriage made it necessary for him to exert himself more strenuously than he had hitherto done. He took a house in the neighborhood of his native town, and advertised for pupils. But eighteen months passed away, and only three pupils came to his academy. Indeed, his appearance was so strange, and his temper so violent, that his school-room must have resembled an ogre's den. Nor was the tawdry painted grandmother whom he called his Titty well qualified to make provision for the comfort of young gentlemen. David Garrick, who was one of the pupils, used, many years later, to throw the best company of London into convulsions of laughter by mimicking the endearments of this extraordinary pair.

At length Johnson, in the twenty-eighth year of his age, determined to seek his fortune in the capital as a literary adventurer. He set out with a few guineas, three acts of the tragedy of "Irene" in manuscript, and two or three letters of introduction from his friend Walmesley.

Never since literature became a calling in England had it been a less gainful calling than at the time when Johnson took up his residence in London. In the preceding generation a writer of eminent merit was sure to be munificently re-

warded by the Government. The least that he could expect was a pension or a sinecure place; and, if he showed any aptitude for politics, he might hope to be a Member of Parliament, a lord of the treasury, an ambassador, a secretary of state. It would be easy, on the other hand, to name several writers of the nineteenth century of whom the least successful has received forty thousand pounds from the booksellers. But Johnson entered on his vocation in the most dreary part of the dreary interval which separated two ages of prosperity. Literature had ceased to flourish under the patronage of the great, and had not begun to flourish under the patronage of the public. One man of letters, indeed, Pope, had acquired by his pen what was then considered as a handsome fortune, and lived on a footing of equality with nobles and ministers of State. But this was a solitary exception. Even an author whose reputation was established, and whose works were popular—such an author as Thomson, whose “Seasons” were in every library, such an author as Fielding, whose “Pasquin” had had a greater run than any drama since “The Beggar’s Opera”—was sometimes glad to obtain, by pawning his best coat, the means of dining on tripe at a cook-shop underground, where he could wipe his hands, after his greasy meal, on the back of a Newfoundland dog. It is easy, therefore, to imagine what humiliations and privations must have awaited the novice who had still to earn a name. One of the publishers

to whom Johnson applied for employment measured with a scornful eye that athletic though uncouth frame, and exclaimed, "You had better get a porter's knot, and carry trunks." Nor was the advice bad, for a porter was likely to be as plentifully fed, and as comfortably lodged, as a poet.

Some time appears to have elapsed before Johnson was able to form any literary connection from which he could expect more than bread for the day which was passing over him. He never forgot the generosity with which Hervey, who was now residing in London, relieved his wants during this time of trial. "Harry Hervey," said the old philosopher many years later, "was a vicious man; but he was very kind to me. If you call a dog Hervey, I shall love him." At Hervey's table Johnson sometimes enjoyed feasts which were made more agreeable by contrast. But in general he dined, and thought that he dined well, on sixpennyworth of meat and a pennyworth of bread at an ale-house near Drury Lane.

The effect of the privations and sufferings which he endured at this time was discernible to the last in his temper and his deportment. His manners had never been courtly; they now became almost savage. Being frequently under the necessity of wearing shabby coats and dirty shirts, he became a confirmed sloven. Being often very hungry when he sat down to his meals, he contracted a habit of eating with ravenous greediness. Even to the end of his life, and even at the ta-

bles of the great, the sight of food affected him as it affects wild beasts and birds of prey. His taste in cookery, formed in subterranean ordinaries and *alamode* beef-shops, was far from delicate. Whenever he was so fortunate as to have near him a hare that had been kept too long, or a meat-pie made with rancid butter, he gorged himself with such violence that his veins swelled, and the moisture broke out on his forehead. The affronts which his poverty emboldened stupid and low-minded men to offer to him would have broken a mean spirit into sycophancy, but made him rude even to ferocity. Unhappily, the insolence which, while it was defensive, was pardonable, and in some sense respectable, accompanied him into societies where he was treated with courtesy and kindness. He was repeatedly provoked into striking those who had taken liberties with him. All the sufferers, however, were wise enough to abstain from talking about their beatings, except Osborne, the most rapacious and brutal of booksellers, who proclaimed everywhere that he had been knocked down by the huge fellow whom he had hired to puff the Harleian Library.

About a year after Johnson had begun to reside in London, he was fortunate enough to obtain regular employment from Cave, an enterprising and intelligent bookseller, who was proprietor and editor of *The Gentleman's Magazine*. That journal, just entering on the ninth year of its long existence, was the only periodical work in the kingdom which then had what would now be

called a large circulation. It was, indeed, the chief source of parliamentary intelligence. It was not then safe, even during a recess, to publish an account of the proceedings of either House without some disguise. Cave, however, ventured to entertain his readers with what he called "Reports of the Debates of the Senate of Lilliput." France was Blefuscu; London was Mildendo; pounds were sprügs; the Duke of Newcastle was the Nardac Secretary of State; Lord Hardwicke was the Hurgo Hickrad; and William Pulteney was Wingul Pulnub. To write the speeches was, during several years, the business of Johnson. He was generally furnished with notes, meagre indeed, and inaccurate, of what had been said; but sometimes he had to find arguments and eloquence both for the ministry and for the opposition. He was himself a Tory, not from rational conviction—for his serious opinion was that one form of government was just as good or as bad as another—but from mere passion, such as inflamed the Capulets against the Montagues, or the Blues of the Roman circus against the Greens. In his infancy he had heard so much talk about the villanies of the Whigs, and the dangers of the Church, that he had become a furious partisan when he could scarcely speak. Before he was three, he had insisted on being taken to hear Sacheverel preach at Lichfield cathedral, and had listened to the sermon with as much respect, and probably with as much intelligence, as any Staffordshire squire in the congregation. The work

which had been begun in the nursery had been completed by the university. Oxford, when Johnson resided there, was the most Jacobitical place in England, and Pembroke was one of the most Jacobitical colleges in Oxford. The prejudices which he brought up to London were scarcely less absurd than those of his own Tom Tempest. Charles the Second and James the Second were two of the best kings that ever reigned. Laud—a poor creature who never did, said, or wrote anything indicating more than the ordinary capacity of an old woman—was a prodigy of parts and learning, over whose tomb Art and Genius still continued to weep. Hampden deserved no more honorable name than that of “the zealot of rebellion.” Even the ship-money, condemned not less decidedly by Falkland and Clarendon than by the bitterest Roundheads, Johnson would not pronounce to have been an unconstitutional impost. Under a government the mildest that had ever been known in the world—under a government which allowed to the people an unprecedented liberty of speech and action—he fancied that he was a slave; he assailed the ministry with obloquy which refuted itself, and regretted the lost freedom and happiness of those golden days in which a writer who had taken but one-tenth part of the license allowed to him would have been pilloried, mangled with the shears, whipped at the cart’s-tail, and flung into a noisome dungeon to die. He hated dissenters and stock-jobbers, the excise and the army, septen-



nial parliaments and Continental connections. He long had an aversion to the Scotch—an aversion of which he could not remember the commencement, but which, he owned, had probably originated in his abhorrence of the conduct of the nation during the Great Rebellion. It is easy to guess in what manner debates on great party questions were likely to be reported by a man whose judgment was so much disordered by party spirit. A show of fairness was indeed necessary to the prosperity of the magazine; but Johnson long afterward owned that, though he had saved appearances, he had taken care that the Whig dogs should not have the best of it; and, in fact, every passage which has lived—every passage which bears the marks of his higher faculties—is put into the mouth of some member of the opposition.

A few weeks after Johnson had entered on these obscure labors, he published a work which at once placed him high among the writers of his age. It is probable that what he had suffered during his first year in London had often reminded him of some parts of that noble poem in which Juvenal had described the misery and degradation of a needy man of letters, lodged among the pigeons' nests in the tottering garrets which overhung the streets of Rome. Pope's admirable imitations of Horace's satires and epistles had recently appeared, were in every hand, and were by many readers thought superior to the originals. What Pope had done for Horace,

Johnson aspired to do for Juvenal. The enterprise was bold, and yet judicious. For between Johnson and Juvenal there was much in common—much more, certainly, than between Pope and Horace.

Johnson's "London" appeared, without his name, in May, 1738. He received only ten guineas for this stately and vigorous poem; but the sale was rapid and the success complete. A second edition was required within a week. Those small critics who are always desirous to lower established reputations ran about proclaiming that the anonymous satirist was superior to Pope in Pope's own peculiar department of literature. It ought to be remembered, to the honor of Pope, that he joined heartily in the applause with which the appearance of a rival genius was welcomed. He made inquiries about the author of "London." Such a man, he said, could not long be concealed. The name was soon discovered; and Pope, with great kindness, exerted himself to obtain an academical degree and the mastership of a grammar-school for the poor young poet. The attempt failed, and Johnson remained a bookseller's hack.

It does not appear that these two men—the most eminent writer of the generation which was going out, and the most eminent writer of the generation which was coming in—ever saw each other. They lived in very different circles—one surrounded by dukes and earls, the other by starving pamphleteers and index-makers. Among

Johnson's associates at this time may be mentioned Boyse, who, when his shirts were pledged, scrawled Latin verses sitting up in bed with his arms through two holes in his blanket, who composed very respectable sacred poetry when he was sober, and who was at last run over by a hackney-coach when he was drunk; Hoole, surnamed the metaphysical tailor, who, instead of attending to his measures, used to trace geometrical diagrams on the board where he sat cross-legged; and the penitent impostor George Psalmanazar, who, after poring all day, in a humble lodging, on the folios of Jewish rabbis and Christian fathers, indulged himself at night with literary and theological conversation at an ale-house in the City. But the most remarkable of the persons with whom at this time Johnson consorted was Richard Savage, an earl's son, a shoemaker's apprentice, and had seen life in all its forms—who had feasted among blue ribbons in St. James's Square, and had lain with fifty pounds' weight of irons on his legs in the condemned ward of Newgate. This man had, after many vicissitudes of fortune, sunk at last into abject and hopeless poverty. His pen had failed him. His patrons had been taken away by death, or estranged by the riotous profusion with which he squandered their bounty, and the ungrateful insolence with which he rejected their advice. He now lived by begging. He dined on venison and champagne whenever he had been so fortunate as to borrow a guinea. If his questing had been

unsuccessful, he appeased the rage of hunger with some scraps of broken meat, and lay down to rest under the piazza of Covent Garden in warm weather, and, in cold weather, as near as he could get to the furnace of a glass-house. Yet, in his misery, he was still an agreeable companion. He had an inexhaustible store of anecdotes about that gay and brilliant world from which he was now an outcast. He had observed the great men of both parties in hours of careless relaxation, had seen the leaders of opposition without the mask of patriotism, and had heard the Prime Minister roar with laughter and tell stories not over-decent. During some months Savage lived in the closest familiarity with Johnson; and then the friends parted, not without tears. Johnson remained in London to drudge for Cave; Savage went to the West of England, lived there as he had lived everywhere, and, in 1743, died, penniless and heart-broken, in Bristol jail.

Soon after his death, while the public curiosity was strongly excited about his extraordinary character and his not less extraordinary adventures, a life of him appeared widely different from the catchpenny lives of eminent men which were then a staple article of manufacture in Grub Street. The style was indeed deficient in ease and variety; and the writer was evidently too partial to the Latin element of our language. But the little work, with all its faults, was a masterpiece. No finer specimen of literary biogra-

phy existed in any language, living or dead ; and a discerning critic might have confidently predicted that the author was destined to be the founder of a new school of English eloquence.

The "Life of Savage" was anonymous ; but it was well known in literary circles that Johnson was the writer. During the three years which followed, he produced no important work ; but he was not, and indeed could not be, idle. The fame of his abilities and learning continued to grow. Warburton pronounced him a man of parts and genius ; and the praise of Warburton was then no light thing. Such was Johnson's reputation that, in 1747, several eminent booksellers combined to employ him in the arduous work of preparing a "Dictionary of the English Language," in two folio volumes. The sum which they agreed to pay him was only fifteen hundred guineas ; and out of this sum he had to pay several poor men of letters who assisted him in the humbler parts of his task.

The prospectus of the "Dictionary" he addressed to the Earl of Chesterfield. Chesterfield had long been celebrated for the politeness of his manners, the brilliancy of his wit, and the delicacy of his taste. He was acknowledged to be the finest speaker in the House of Lords. He had recently governed Ireland, at a momentous conjuncture, with eminent firmness, wisdom, and humanity, and he had since become Secretary of State. He received Johnson's homage with the most winning affability, and requited it with a

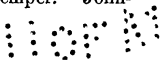
few guineas, bestowed doubtless in a very graceful manner, but was by no means desirous to see all his carpets blackened with the London mud, and his soups and wines thrown to right and left over the gowns of fine ladies and the waistcoats of fine gentlemen, by an absent, awkward scholar, who gave strange starts and uttered strange growls, who dressed like a scarecrow and ate like a cormorant. During some time Johnson continued to call on his patron, but, after being repeatedly told by the porter that his lordship was not at home, took the hint, and ceased to present himself at the inhospitable door.

Johnson had flattered himself that he should have completed his "Dictionary" by the end of 1750, but it was not till 1755 that he at length gave his huge volumes to the world. During the seven years which he passed in the drudgery of penning definitions and marking quotations for transcription, he sought for relaxation in literary labor of a more agreeable kind. In 1749 he published the "Vanity of Human Wishes," an excellent imitation of the tenth satire of Juvenal. It is, in truth, not easy to say whether the palm belongs to the ancient or to the modern poet. The couplets in which the fall of Wolsey is described, though lofty and sonorous, are feeble when compared with the wonderful lines which bring before us all Rome in tumult on the day of the fall of Sejanus—the laurels on the doorposts, the white bull stalking toward the Capitol, the statues rolling down from their pedestals, the

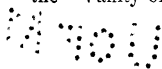
flatterers of the disgraced minister running to see him dragged with a hook through the streets, and to have a kick at his carcass before it is hurled into the Tiber. It must be owned, too, that in the concluding passage the Christian moralist has not made the most of his advantages, and has fallen decidedly short of the sublimity of his Pagan model. On the other hand, Juvenal's Hannibal must yield to Johnson's Charles; and Johnson's vigorous and pathetic enumeration of the miseries of a literary life must be allowed to be superior to Juvenal's lamentation over the fate of Demosthenes and Cicero.

For the copyright of the "Vanity of Human Wishes" Johnson received only fifteen guineas.

A few days after the publication of this poem, his tragedy, begun many years before, was brought on the stage. His pupil, David Garrick, had, in 1741, made his appearance on a humble stage in Goodman's Fields, had at once risen to the first place among actors, and was now, after several years of almost uninterrupted success, manager of Drury Lane Theatre. The relation between him and his old preceptor was of a very singular kind. They repelled each other strongly, and yet attracted each other strongly. Nature had made them of very different clay, and circumstances had fully brought out the natural peculiarities of both. Sudden prosperity had turned Garrick's head. Continued adversity had soured Johnson's temper. John-



son saw with more envy than became so great a man the villa, the plate, the china, the Brussels carpet, which the little mimic had got by repeating, with grimaces and gesticulations, what wiser men had written; and the exquisitely sensitive vanity of Garrick was galled by the thought that, while all the rest of the world was applauding him, he could obtain from one morose cynic, whose opinion it was impossible to despise, scarcely any compliment not acidulated with scorn. Yet the two Lichfield men had so many early recollections in common, and sympathized with each other on so many points on which they sympathized with nobody else in the vast population of the capital, that, though the master was often provoked by the monkey-like impertinence of the pupil, and the pupil by the bearish rudeness of the master, they remained friends till they were parted by death. Garrick now brought "Irene" out, with alterations sufficient to displease the author, yet not sufficient to make the piece pleasing to the audience. The public, however, listened, with little emotion, but with much civility, to five acts of monotonous declamation. After nine representations, the play was withdrawn. It is, indeed, altogether unsuited to the stage, and, even when perused in the closet, will be found hardly worthy of the author. He had not the slightest notion of what blank verse should be. A change in the last syllable of every other line would make the versification of the "Vanity of Human Wishes" closely resem-





ble the versification of "Irene." The poet, however, cleared, by his benefit nights, and by the sale of the copyright of his tragedy, about three hundred pounds—then a great sum in his estimation.

About a year after the representation of "Irene," he began to publish a series of short essays on morals, manners, and literature. This species of composition had been brought into fashion by the success of *The Tatler*, and by the still more brilliant success of *The Spectator*. A crowd of small writers had vainly attempted to rival Addison. "The Lay Monastery," *The Censor*, *The Freethinker*, *The Plain Dealer*, *The Champion*, and other works of the same kind, had had their short day. None of them had obtained a permanent place in our literature; and they are now to be found only in the libraries of the curious. At length Johnson undertook the adventure in which so many aspirants had failed. In the thirty-sixth year after the appearance of the last number of *The Spectator* appeared the first number of *The Rambler*. From March, 1750, to March, 1752, this paper continued to come out every Tuesday and Saturday.

From the first, *The Rambler* was enthusiastically admired by a few eminent men. Richardson, when only five numbers had appeared, pronounced it equal, if not superior, to *The Spectator*. Young and Hartley expressed their approbation not less warmly. Bubb Dodington, among whose many faults indifference to the claims of

genius and learning cannot be reckoned, solicited the acquaintance of the writer. In consequence, probably, of the good offices of Dodington, who was then the confidential adviser of Prince Frederick, two of his royal highness's gentlemen carried a gracious message to the printing-office, and ordered seven copies for Leicester House. But these overtures seem to have been very coldly received. Johnson had had enough of the patronage of the great to last him all his life, and was not disposed to haunt any other door as he had haunted the door of Chesterfield.

By the public *The Rambler* was at first very coldly received. Though the price of a number was only twopence, the sale did not amount to five hundred. The profits were therefore very small. But as soon as the flying leaves were collected and reprinted, they became popular. The author lived to see thirteen thousand copies spread over England alone. Separate editions were published for the Scotch and Irish markets. A large party pronounced the style perfect, so absolutely perfect, that in some essays it would be impossible for the writer himself to alter a single word for the better. Another party, not less numerous, vehemently accused him of having corrupted the purity of the English tongue. The best critics admitted that his diction was too monotonous, too obviously artificial, and now and then turgid even to absurdity. But they did justice to the acuteness of his observations on morals and manners, to the constant precision and

frequent brilliancy of his language, to the weighty and magnificent eloquence of many serious passages, and to the solemn yet pleasing humor of some of the lighter papers. On the question of precedence between Addison and Johnson, a question which, seventy years ago, was much disputed, posterity has pronounced a decision from which there is no appeal. Sir Roger, his chaplain and his butler, Will Wimble and Will Honeycomb, the "Vision of Mirza," the "Journal of the Retired Citizen," the "Everlasting Club," the "Dunmow Flitch," the "Loves of Hilpah and Shalum," the "Visit to the Exchange," and the "Visit to the Abbey," are known to everybody. But many men and women, even of highly cultivated minds, are unacquainted with Squire Bluster and Mrs. Busy, "Quisquillius and Venustulus," the "Allegory of Wit and Learning," the Chronicle of the Revolutions of a Garret," and the sad fate of "Aningait and Ajut."

The last *Rambler* was written in a sad and gloomy hour. Mrs. Johnson had been given over by the physicians. Three days later she died. She left her husband almost broken-hearted. Many people had been surprised to see a man of his genius and learning stooping to every drudgery, and denying himself almost every comfort, for the purpose of supplying a silly, affected old woman with superfluities which she accepted with but little gratitude. But all his affection had been concentrated on her. He had neither brother nor sister, neither son nor daughter. To

him she was beautiful as the Gunnings, and witty as Lady Mary. Her opinion of his writings was more important to him than the voice of the pit of Drury Lane Theatre, or the judgment of *The Monthly Review*. The chief support which had sustained him through the most arduous labor of his life was the hope that she would enjoy the fame and the profit which he anticipated from his "Dictionary." She was gone; and, in that vast labyrinth of streets, peopled by eight hundred thousand human beings, he was alone. Yet it was necessary for him to set himself, as he expressed it, doggedly to work. After three more laborious years, the "Dictionary" was at length complete.

It had been generally supposed that this great work would be dedicated to the eloquent and accomplished nobleman to whom the Prospectus had been addressed. He well knew the value of such a compliment; and therefore, when the day of publication drew near, he exerted himself to soothe, by a show of zealous and at the same time of delicate and judicious kindness, the pride which he had so cruelly wounded. Since the *Ramblers* had ceased to appear, the town had been entertained by a journal called *The World*, to which many men of high rank and fashion contributed. In two successive numbers of *The World*, the "Dictionary" was, to use the modern phrase, puffed with wonderful skill. The writings of Johnson were warmly praised. It was proposed that he should be invested with the au-

thority of a dictator, nay, of a pope, over our language, and that his decisions about the meaning and the spelling of words should be received as final. His two folios, it was said, would of course be bought by everybody who could afford to buy them. It was soon known that these papers were written by Chesterfield. But the just resentment of Johnson was not to be so appeased. In a letter written with singular energy and dignity of thought and language, he repelled the tardy advances of his patron. The "Dictionary" came forth without a dedication. In the preface the author truly declared that he owed nothing to the great, and described the difficulties with which he had been left to struggle so forcibly and pathetically that the ablest and most malevolent of all the enemies of his fame, Horne Tooke, never could read that passage without tears.

The public, on this occasion, did Johnson full justice, and something more than justice. The best lexicographer may well be content if his productions are received by the world with cold esteem. But Johnson's "Dictionary" was hailed with an enthusiasm such as no similar work has ever excited. It was indeed the first dictionary which could be read with pleasure. The definitions show so much acuteness of thought and command of language, and the passages quoted from poets, divines, and philosophers are so skillfully selected, that a leisure hour may always be very agreeably spent in turning over the pages. The faults of the book resolve themselves, for the

most part, into one great fault. Johnson was a wretched etymologist. He knew little or nothing of any Teutonic language except English, which indeed, as he wrote it, was scarcely a Teutonic language; and thus he was absolutely at the mercy of Junius and Skinner.

The "Dictionary" though it raised Johnson's fame, added nothing to his pecuniary means. The fifteen hundred guineas which the booksellers had agreed to pay him had been advanced and spent before the last sheets issued from the press. It is painful to relate that, twice in the course of the year which followed the publication of this great work, he was arrested and carried to spunging-houses, and that he was twice indebted for his liberty to his excellent friend Richardson. It was still necessary for the man who had been formally saluted by the highest authority as dictator of the English language to supply his wants by constant toil. He abridged his "Dictionary." He proposed to bring out an edition of Shakspeare by subscription, and many subscribers sent in their names and laid down their money; but he soon found the task so little to his taste that he turned to more attractive employments. He contributed many papers to a new monthly journal, which was called *The Literary Magazine*. Few of these papers have much interest; but among them was the very best thing that he ever wrote, a masterpiece both of reasoning and of satirical pleasantry, the review of Jenyns's "Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil."

In the spring of 1758 Johnson put forth the first of a series of essays, entitled *The Idler*. During two years these essays continued to appear weekly. They were eagerly read, widely circulated, and, indeed, impudently pirated while they were still in the original form, and had a large sale when collected into volumes. *The Idler* may be described as a second part of *The Rambler*, somewhat livelier and somewhat weaker than the first part.

While Johnson was busied with his *Idlers*, his mother, who had accomplished her ninetieth year, died at Lichfield. It was long since he had seen her; but he had not failed to contribute largely out of his small means to her comfort. In order to defray the charges of her funeral, and to pay some debts which she had left, he wrote a little book in a single week, and sent off the sheets to the press without reading them over. A hundred pounds were paid him for the copyright; and the purchasers had great cause to be pleased with their bargain; for the book was "Rasselas."

The success of "Rasselas" was great, though such ladies as Miss Lydia Languish must have been grievously disappointed when they found that the new volume from the circulating library was little more than a dissertation on the author's favorite theme, the Vanity of Human Wishes; that the Prince of Abyssinia was without a mistress, and the Princess without a lover; and that the story set the hero and the heroine down exactly where it had taken them up. The style

was the subject of much eager controversy. *The Monthly Review* and *The Critical Review* took different sides. Many readers pronounced the writer a pompous pedant, who would never use a word of two syllables where it was possible to use a word of six, and who could not make a waiting-woman relate her adventures without balancing every noun with another noun, and every epithet with another epithet. Another party, not less zealous, cited with delight numerous passages in which weighty meaning was expressed with accuracy and illustrated with splendor. And both the censure and the praise were merited.

About the plan of "Rasselas" little was said by the critics; and yet the faults of the plan might seem to invite severe criticism. Johnson has frequently blamed Shakspeare for neglecting the proprieties of time and place, and for ascribing to one age or nation the manners and opinions of another. Yet Shakspeare has not sinned in this way more grievously than Johnson. Rasselas and Imlac, Nekayah and Pekuah, are evidently meant to be Abyssinians of the eighteenth century; for the Europe which Imlac describes is the Europe of the eighteenth century; and the inmates of the Happy Valley talk familiarly of that law of gravitation which Newton discovered, and which was not fully received even at Cambridge till the eighteenth century. What a real company of Abyssinians would have been may be learned from Bruce's "Travels." But Johnson, not content with turning filthy savages, igno-



rant of their letters, and gorged with raw steaks cut from living cows, into philosophers as eloquent and enlightened as himself or his friend Burke, and into ladies as highly accomplished as Mrs. Lennox or Mrs. Sheridan, transferred the whole domestic system of England to Egypt. Into a land of harems, a land of polygamy, a land where women are married without ever being seen, he introduced the flirtations and jealousies of our ballrooms. In a land where there is boundless liberty of divorce, wedlock is described as the indissoluble compact. "A youth and maiden meeting by chance, or brought together by artifice, exchange glances, reciprocate civilities, go home, and dream of each other. Such," says Rasselas, "is the common process of marriage." Such it may have been, and may still be, in London, but assuredly not at Cairo. A writer who was guilty of such improprieties had little right to blame the poet who made Hector quote Aristotle, and represented Julio Romano as flourishing in the days of the oracle of Delphi.

By such exertions as have been described, Johnson supported himself till the year 1762. In that year a great change in his circumstances took place. He had from a child been an enemy of the reigning dynasty. His Jacobite prejudices had been exhibited with little disguise both in his works and in his conversation. Even in his massy and elaborate "Dictionary," he had, with a strange want of taste and judgment, inserted bitter and contumelious reflections on the Whig

party. The excise, which was a favorite resource of Whig financiers, he had designated as a hateful tax. He had railed against the commissioners of excise in language so coarse that they had seriously thought of prosecuting him. He had with difficulty been prevented from holding up the Lord Privy Seal by name as an example of the meaning of the word "renegade." A pension he had defined as pay given to a State hireling to betray his country; a pensioner, as a slave of State hired by a stipend to obey a master. It seemed unlikely that the author of these definitions would himself be pensioned. But that was a time of wonders. George the Third had ascended the throne; and had, in the course of a few months, disgusted many of the old friends and conciliated many of the old enemies of his house. The City was becoming mutinous. Oxford was becoming loyal. Cavendishes and Bentincks were murmuring. Somersets and Wyndhams were hastening to kiss hands. The head of the Treasury was now Lord Bute, who was a Tory, and could have no objection to Johnson's Toryism. Bute wished to be thought a patron of men of letters; and Johnson was one of the most eminent and one of the most needy men of letters in Europe. A pension of three hundred a year was graciously offered, and with very little hesitation accepted.

This event produced a change in Johnson's whole way of life. For the first time since his boyhood he no longer felt the daily goad urging

him to the daily toil. He was at liberty, after thirty years of anxiety and drudgery, to indulge his constitutional indolence, to lie in bed till two in the afternoon, and to sit up talking till four in the morning, without fearing either the printer's devil or the sheriff's officer.

One laborious task, indeed, he had bound himself to perform. He had received large subscriptions for his promised edition of Shakspeare; he had lived on those subscriptions during some years; and he could not without disgrace omit to perform his part of the contract. His friends repeatedly exhorted him to make an effort, and he repeatedly resolved to do so. But, notwithstanding their exhortations and his resolutions, month followed month, year followed year, and nothing was done. He prayed fervently against his idleness; he determined, as often as he received the sacrament, that he would no longer doze away and trifle away his time; but the spell under which he lay resisted prayer and sacrament. His private notes at this time are made up of self-reproaches. "My indolence," he wrote on Easter-eve in 1764, "has sunk into grosser sluggishness. A kind of strange oblivion has overspread me, so that I know not what has become of the last year." Easter, 1765, came, and found him still in the same state. "My time," he wrote, "has been unprofitably spent, and seems as a dream that has left nothing behind. My memory grows confused, and I know not how the days pass over me." Happily for his honor, the

charm which held him captive was at length broken by no gentle or friendly hand. He had been weak enough to pay serious attention to a story about a ghost which haunted a house in Cock Lane, and had actually gone himself, with some of his friends, at one in the morning, to St. John's Church, Clerkenwell, in the hope of receiving a communication from the perturbed spirit. But the spirit, though adjured with all solemnity, remained obstinately silent; and it soon appeared that a naughty girl of eleven had been amusing herself by making fools of so many philosophers. Churchill, who, confident in his powers, drunk with popularity, and burning with party spirit, was looking for some man of established fame and Tory politics to insult, celebrated the Cock Lane Ghost in three cantos, nicknamed "Johnson Pomposo," asked where the book was which had been so long promised and so liberally paid for, and directly accused the great moralist of cheating. This terrible word proved effectual; and in October, 1765, appeared, after a delay of nine years, the new edition of Shakspeare.

This publication saved Johnson's character for honesty, but added nothing to the fame of his abilities and learning. The preface, though it contains some good passages, is not in his best manner. The most valuable notes are those in which he had an opportunity of showing how attentively he had during many years observed human life and human nature. The best specimen is the note on the character of Polonius.

Nothing so good is to be found even in Wilhelm Meister's admirable examination of "Hamlet." But here praise must end. It would be difficult to name a more slovenly, a more worthless edition of any great classic. The reader may turn over play after play without finding one happy conjectural emendation, or one ingenious and satisfactory explanation of a passage which had baffled preceding commentators. Johnson had, in his Prospectus, told the world that he was peculiarly fitted for the task which he had undertaken, because he had, as a lexicographer, been under the necessity of taking a wider view of the English language than any of his predecessors. That his knowledge of our literature was extensive, is indisputable. But, unfortunately, he had altogether neglected that very part of our literature with which it is especially desirable that an editor of Shakspeare should be conversant. It is dangerous to assert a negative. Yet little will be risked by the assertion that in the two folio volumes of the "English Dictionary" there is not a single passage quoted from any dramatist of the Elizabethan age, except Shakspeare and Ben. Even from Ben the quotations are few. Johnson might easily, in a few months, have made himself well acquainted with every old play that was extant. But it never seems to have occurred to him that this was a necessary preparation for the work which he had undertaken. He would doubtless have admitted that it would be the height of absurdity in a man

who was not familiar with the works of Æschylus and Euripides to publish an edition of Sophocles. Yet he ventured to publish an edition of Shakspeare without having ever in his life, as far as can be discovered, read a single scene of Massinger, Ford, Decker, Webster, Marlowe, Beaumont, or Fletcher. His detractors were noisy and scurrilous. Those who most loved and honored him had little to say in praise of the manner in which he had discharged the duty of a commentator. He had, however, acquitted himself of a debt which had long lain heavy on his conscience, and he sunk back into the repose from which the sting of satire had roused him. He long continued to live upon the fame which he had already won. He was honored by the University of Oxford with a doctor's degree, by the Royal Academy with a professorship, and by the king with an interview, in which his majesty most graciously expressed a hope that so excellent a writer would not cease to write. In the interval, however, between 1765 and 1775 Johnson published only two or three political tracts, the longest of which he could have produced in forty-eight hours, if he had worked as he worked on the "Life of Savage" and on "Rasselas."

But, though his pen was now idle, his tongue was active. The influence exercised by his conversation, directly upon those with whom he lived, and indirectly on the whole literary world, was altogether without a parallel. His colloquial talents were indeed of the highest order. He had

strong sense, quick discernment, wit, humor, immense knowledge of literature and of life, and an infinite store of curious anecdotes. As respected style, he spoke far better than he wrote. Every sentence which dropped from his lips was as correct in structure as the most nicely balanced period of *The Rambler*. But in his talk there were no pompous triads, and little more than a fair proportion of words in *osity* and *ation*. All was simplicity, ease, and vigor. He uttered his short, weighty, and pointed sentences with a power of voice, and a justness and energy of emphasis, of which the effect was rather increased than diminished by the rollings of his huge form, and by the asthmatic gaspings and puffings in which the peals of his eloquence generally ended. Nor did the laziness which made him unwilling to sit down to his desk prevent him from giving instruction or entertainment orally. To discuss questions of taste, of learning, of casuistry, in language so exact and so forcible that it might have been printed without the alteration of a word, was to him no exertion, but a pleasure. He loved, as he said, to fold his legs and have his talk out. He was ready to bestow the overflowings of his full mind on anybody who would start a subject, on a fellow-passenger in a stage-coach, or on the person who sat at the same table with him in an eating-house. But his conversation was nowhere so brilliant and striking as when he was surrounded by a few friends, whose abilities and knowledge enabled them, as

he once expressed it, to send him back every ball that he threw. Some of these, in 1764, formed themselves into a club, which gradually became a formidable power in the commonwealth of letters. The verdicts pronounced by this conclave on new books were speedily known over all London, and were sufficient to sell off a whole edition in a day, or to condemn the sheets to the service of the trunk-maker and the pastry-cook. Nor shall we think this strange when we consider what great and various talents and acquirements met in the little fraternity. Goldsmith was the representative of poetry and light literature, Reynolds of the arts, Burke of political eloquence and political philosophy. There, too, were Gibbon, the greatest historian, and Jones, the greatest linguist, of the age. Garrick brought to the meeting his inexhaustible pleasantry, his incomparable mimicry, and his consummate knowledge of stage effect. Among the most constant attendants were two high-born and high-bred gentlemen, closely bound together by friendship, but of widely different characters and habits—Bennet Langton, distinguished by his skill in Greek literature, by the orthodoxy of his opinions, and by the sanctity of his life; and Topham Beauclerk, renowned for his amours, his knowledge of the gay world, his fastidious taste, and his sarcastic wit. To predominate over such a society was not easy. Yet even over such a society Johnson predominated. Burke might indeed have disputed the supremacy to which oth-



ers were under the necessity of submitting. But Burke, though not generally a very patient listener, was content to take the second part when Johnson was present; and the club itself, consisting of so many eminent men, is to this day popularly designated as Johnson's Club.

Among the members of this celebrated body was one to whom it has owed the greater part of its celebrity, yet who was regarded with little respect by his brethren, and had not without difficulty obtained a seat among them. This was James Boswell, a young Scotch lawyer, heir to an honorable name and a fair estate. That he was a coxcomb and a bore, weak, vain, pushing, curious, garrulous, was obvious to all who were acquainted with him. That he could not reason, that he had no wit, no humor, no eloquence, is apparent from his writings. And yet his writings are read beyond the Mississippi, and under the Southern Cross, and are likely to be read as long as the English exists, either as a living or as a dead language. Nature had made him a slave and an idolater. His mind resembled those creepers which the botanists call parasites, and which can subsist only by clinging round the stems and imbibing the juices of stronger plants. He must have fastened himself on somebody. He might have fastened himself on Wilkes, and have become the fiercest patriot in the Bill of Rights Society. He might have fastened himself on Whitefield, and have become the loudest field-preacher among the Calvinistic Methodists. In a happy

hour he fastened himself on Johnson. The pair might seem ill-matched; for Johnson had early been prejudiced against Boswell's country. To a man of Johnson's strong understanding and irritable temper, the silly egotism and adulation of Boswell must have been as teasing as the constant buzz of a fly. Johnson hated to be questioned; and Boswell was eternally catechising him on all kinds of subjects, and sometimes propounded such questions as, "What would you do, sir, if you were locked up in a tower with a baby?" Johnson was a water-drinker, and Boswell was a wine-bibber, and indeed little better than an habitual sot. It was impossible that there should be perfect harmony between two such companions. Indeed, the great man was sometimes provoked into fits of passion, in which he said things which the small man, during a few hours, seriously resented. Every quarrel, however, was soon made up. During twenty years the disciple continued to worship the master: the master continued to scold the disciple, to sneer at him, and to love him. The two friends ordinarily resided at a great distance from each other. Boswell practised in the Parliament-house of Edinburgh, and could pay only occasional visits to London. During those visits his chief business was to watch Johnson, to discover all Johnson's habits, to turn the conversation to subjects about which Johnson was likely to say something remarkable, and to fill quarto note-books with minutes of what Johnson had said. In this way were gathered

the materials out of which was afterward constructed the most interesting biographical work in the world.

Soon after the club began to exist, Johnson formed a connection less important indeed to his fame, but much more important to his happiness, than his connection with Boswell. Henry Thrale, one of the most opulent brewers in the kingdom, a man of sound and cultivated understanding, rigid principles, and liberal spirit, was married to one of those clever, kind-hearted, engaging, vain, pert, young women, who are perpetually doing or saying what is not exactly right, but who, do or say what they may, are always agreeable. In 1765 the Thrales became acquainted with Johnson, and the acquaintance ripened fast into friendship. They were astonished and delighted by the brilliancy of his conversation. They were flattered by finding that a man so widely celebrated preferred their house to any other in London. Even the peculiarities which seemed to unfit him for civilized society, his gesticulations, his rollings, his puffings, his mutterings, the strange way in which he put on his clothes, the ravenous eagerness with which he devoured his dinner, his fits of melancholy, his fits of anger, his frequent rudeness, his occasional ferocity, increased the interest which his new associates took in him. For these things were the cruel marks left behind by a life which had been one long conflict with disease and with adversity. In a vulgar hack writer, such oddities would have excited

only disgust. But in a man of genius, learning, and virtue, their effect was to add pity to admiration and esteem. Johnson soon had an apartment at the brewery in Southwark, and a still more pleasant apartment at the villa of his friends on Streatham Common. A large part of every year he passed in those abodes—abodes which must have seemed magnificent and luxurious indeed, when compared with the dens in which he had generally been lodged. But his chief pleasures were derived from what the astronomer of his Abyssinian tale called “the endearing elegance of female friendship.” Mrs. Thrale rallied him, soothed him, coaxed him, and, if she sometimes provoked him by her flippancy, made ample amends by listening to his reproofs with angelic sweetness of temper. When he was diseased in body and in mind, she was the most tender of nurses. No comfort that wealth could purchase, no contrivance that womanly ingenuity, set to work by womanly compassion, could devise, was wanting to his sick-room. He requited her kindness by an affection pure as the affection of a father, yet delicately tinged with a gallantry which, though awkward, must have been more flattering than the attentions of a crowd of the fools who gloried in the names, now obsolete, of Buck and Maccaroni. It should seem that a full half of Johnson’s life, during about sixteen years, was passed under the roof of the Thrales. He accompanied the family sometimes to Bath, and sometimes to Brighton; once to Wales, and once

to Paris. But he had at the same time a house in one of the narrow and gloomy courts on the north of Fleet Street. In the garrets was his library, a large and miscellaneous collection of books, falling to pieces and begrimed with dust. On a lower floor he sometimes, but very rarely, regaled a friend with a plain dinner, a veal pie, or a leg of lamb and spinach, and a rice pudding. Nor was the dwelling uninhabited during his long absences. It was the home of the most extraordinary assemblage of inmates that ever was brought together. At the head of the establishment Johnson had placed an old lady named Williams, whose chief recommendations were her blindness and her poverty. But, in spite of her murmurs and reproaches, he gave an asylum to another lady who was as poor as herself, Mrs. Desmoulins, whose family he had known many years before in Staffordshire. Room was found for the daughter of Mrs. Desmoulins, and for another destitute damsel, who was generally addressed as Miss Carmichael, but whom her generous host called Polly. An old quack doctor named Levett, who bled and dosed coal-heavers and hackney coachmen, and received for fees crusts of bread, bits of bacon, glasses of gin, and sometimes a little copper, completed this strange menagerie. All these poor creatures were at constant war with each other, and with Johnson's negro servant Frank. Sometimes, indeed, they transferred their hostilities from the servant to the master, complained that a better table was

not kept for them, and railed or maundered till their benefactor was glad to make his escape to Streatham, or to the Mitre tavern. And yet he, who was generally the haughtiest and most irritable of mankind, who was but too prompt to resent anything which looked like a slight on the part of a purse-proud bookseller, or of a noble and powerful patron, bore patiently from mendicants, who, but for his bounty, must have gone to the workhouse, insults more provoking than those for which he had knocked down Osborne and bidden defiance to Chesterfield. Year after year Mrs. Williams and Mrs. Desmoulins, Polly and Levett, continued to torment him and to live upon him.

The course of life which has been described was interrupted in Johnson's sixty-fourth year by an important event. He had early read an account of the Hebrides, and had been much interested by learning that there was so near him a land peopled by a race which was still as rude and simple as in the Middle Ages. A wish to become intimately acquainted with a state of society so utterly unlike all that he had ever seen frequently crossed his mind. But it is not probable that his curiosity would have overcome his habitual sluggishness, and his love of the smoke, the mud, and the cries of London, had not Boswell importuned him to attempt the adventure, and offered to be his squire. At length, in August, 1773, Johnson crossed the Highland line, and plunged courageously into what was then

considered, by most Englishmen, as a dreary and perilous wilderness. After wandering about two months through the Celtic region, sometimes in rude boats which did not protect him from the rain, and sometimes on small shaggy ponies which could hardly bear his weight, he returned to his old haunts with a mind full of new images and new theories. During the following year he employed himself in recording his adventures. About the beginning of 1775, his "Journey to the Hebrides" was published, and was, during some weeks, the chief subject of conversation in all circles in which any attention was paid to literature. The book is still read with pleasure. The narrative is entertaining; the speculations, whether sound or unsound, are always ingenious; and the style, though too stiff and pompous, is somewhat easier and more graceful than that of his early writings. His prejudice against the Scotch had at length become little more than matter of jest; and whatever remained of the old feeling had been effectually removed by the kind and respectful hospitality with which he had been received in every part of Scotland. It was, of course, not to be expected that an Oxonian Tory should praise the Presbyterian polity and ritual, or that an eye accustomed to the hedge-rows and parks of England should not be struck by the bareness of Berwickshire and East Lothian. But even in censure Johnson's tone is not unfriendly. The most enlightened Scotchmen, with Lord Mansfield at their head, were well

pleased. But some foolish and ignorant Scotchmen were moved to anger by a little unpalatable truth which was mingled with much eulogy, and assailed him whom they chose to consider as the enemy of their country with libels much more dishonorable to their country than anything that he had ever said or written. They published paragraphs in the newspapers, articles in the magazines, sixpenny pamphlets, five-shilling books. One scribbler abused Johnson for being blear-eyed; another for being a pensioner; a third informed the world that one of the doctor's uncles had been convicted of felony in Scotland, and had found that there was in that country one tree capable of supporting the weight of an Englishman. Macpherson, whose "Fingal" had been proved in the "Journey" to be an impudent forgery, threatened to take vengeance with a cane. The only effect of this threat was that Johnson reiterated the charge of forgery in the most contemptuous terms, and walked about, during some time, with a cudgel, which, if the impostor had not been too wise to encounter it, would assuredly have descended upon him, to borrow the sublime language of his own epic poem, "like a hammer on the red son of the furnace."

Of other assailants Johnson took no notice whatever. He had early resolved never to be drawn into controversy; and he adhered to his resolution with a steadfastness which is the more extraordinary because he was, both intellectually



and morally, of the stuff of which controversialists are made. In conversation he was a singularly eager, acute, and pertinacious disputant. When at a loss for good reasons, he had recourse to sophistry; and when heated by altercation, he made unsparing use of sarcasm and invective. But when he took his pen in his hand, his whole character seemed to be changed. A hundred bad writers misrepresented him and reviled him; but not one of the hundred could boast of having been thought by him worthy of a refutation, or even of a retort. The Kenricks, Campbells, MacNichols, and Hendersons did their best to annoy him, in the hope that he would give them importance by answering them. But the reader will in vain search his works for any allusion to Kenrick or Campbell, to MacNichol or Henderson. One Scotchman, bent on vindicating the fame of Scotch learning, defied him to the combat in a detestable Latin hexameter:

“Maxime, si tu vis, cupio contendere tecum.”

But Johnson took no notice of the challenge. He had learned, both from his own observation and from literary history, in which he was deeply read, that the place of books in the public estimation is fixed, not by what is written about them, but by what is written in them; and that an author whose works are likely to live is very unwise if he stoops to wrangle with detractors whose works are certain to die. He always maintained that fame was a shuttlecock, which could

be kept up only by being beaten back, as well as beaten forward, and which would soon fall if there were only one battledore. No saying was oftener in his mouth than that fine apophthegm of Bentley, that no man was ever written down but by himself.

Unhappily, a few months after the appearance of the "Journey to the Hebrides," Johnson did what none of his envious assailants could have done, and, to a certain extent, succeeded in writing himself down. The disputes between England and her American colonies had reached a point at which no amicable adjustment was possible. Civil war was evidently impending; and the ministers seem to have thought that the eloquence of Johnson might, with advantage, be employed to inflame the nation against the opposition here, and against the rebels beyond the Atlantic. He had already written two or three tracts in defense of the foreign and domestic policy of the Government; and those tracts, though hardly worthy of him, were much superior to the crowd of pamphlets which lay on the counters of Almon and Stockdale. But his "Taxation No Tyranny" was a pitiable failure. The very title was a silly phrase, which can have been recommended to his choice by nothing but a jingling alliteration which he ought to have despised. The arguments were such as boys use in debating societies. The pleasantry was as awkward as the gambols of a hippopotamus. Even Boswell was forced to own that in this unfortunate piece

he could detect no trace of his master's powers. The general opinion was that the strong faculties which had produced the "Dictionary" and *The Rambler* were beginning to feel the effect of time and of disease, and that the old man would best consult his credit by writing no more.

But this was a great mistake. Johnson had failed, not because his mind was less vigorous than when he wrote "Rasselas" in the evenings of a week, but because he had foolishly chosen, or suffered others to choose for him, a subject such as he would at no time have been competent to treat. He was in no sense a statesman. He never willingly read, or thought, or talked about affairs of State. He loved biography, literary history, the history of manners; but political history was positively distasteful to him. The question at issue between the colonies and the mother-country was a question about which he had really nothing to say. He failed, therefore, as the greatest men must fail when they attempt to do that for which they are unfit; as Burke would have failed if Burke had tried to write comedies like those of Sheridan; as Reynolds would have failed if Reynolds had tried to paint landscapes like those of Wilson. Happily, Johnson soon had an opportunity of proving most signally that his failure was not to be ascribed to intellectual decay.

On Easter-eve, 1777, some persons, deputed by a meeting which consisted of forty of the first booksellers in London, called upon him. Though

he had some scruples about doing business at that season, he received his visitors with much civility. They came to inform him that a new edition of the English poets, from Cowley downward, was in contemplation, and to ask him to furnish short biographical prefaces. He readily undertook the task, a task for which he was pre-eminently qualified. His knowledge of the literary history of England since the Restoration was unrivalled. That knowledge he had derived partly from books, and partly from sources which had long been closed; from old Grub Street traditions; from the talk of forgotten poetasters and pamphleteers who had long been lying in parish vaults; from the recollections of such men as Gilbert Walmesley, who had conversed with the wits of Button; Cibber, who had mutilated the plays of two generations of dramatists; Orery, who had been admitted to the society of Swift; and Savage, who had rendered services of no very honorable kind to Pope. The biographer, therefore, sat down to his task with a mind full of matter. He had at first intended to give only a paragraph to every minor poet, and only four or five pages to the greatest name. But the flood of anecdote and criticism overflowed the narrow channel. The work, which was originally meant to consist only of a few sheets, swelled into ten volumes—small volumes, it is true, and not closely printed. The first four appeared in 1779, the remaining six in 1781.

The "Lives of the Poets" are, on the whole, the

best of Johnson's works. The narratives are as entertaining as any novel. The remarks on life and on human nature are eminently shrewd and profound. The criticisms are often excellent, and, even when grossly and provokingly unjust, well deserve to be studied; for, however erroneous they may be, they are never silly. They are the judgments of a mind trammelled by prejudice and deficient in sensibility, but vigorous and acute. They therefore generally contain a portion of valuable truth which deserves to be separated from the alloy; and, at the very worst, they mean something, a praise to which much of what is called criticism in our time has no pretensions.

"Savage's Life" Johnson reprinted nearly as it had appeared in 1744. Whoever, after reading that life, will turn to the other lives, will be struck by the difference of style. Since Johnson had been at ease in his circumstances, he had written little and had talked much. When, therefore, he, after the lapse of years, resumed his pen, the mannerism which he had contracted while he was in the constant habit of elaborate composition was less perceptible than formerly; and his diction frequently had a colloquial ease which it had formerly wanted. The improvement may be discerned by a skilful critic in the "Journey to the Hebrides," and in the "Lives of the Poets" is so obvious that it cannot escape the notice of the most careless reader.

Among the "Lives" the best are perhaps those

of Cowley, Dryden, and Pope. The very worst is, beyond all doubt, that of Gray.

This great work at once became popular. There was, indeed, much just and much unjust censure; but even those who were loudest in blame were attracted by the book in spite of themselves. Malone computed the gains of the publishers at five or six thousand pounds. But the writer was very poorly remunerated. Intending at first to write very short prefaces, he had stipulated for only two hundred guineas. The booksellers, when they saw how far his performance had surpassed his promise, added only another hundred. Indeed, Johnson, though he did not despise, or affect to despise, money, and though his strong sense and long experience ought to have qualified him to protect his own interests, seems to have been singularly unskilful and unlucky in his literary bargains. He was generally reputed the first English writer of his time. Yet several writers of his time sold their copyrights for sums such as he never ventured to ask. To give a single instance, Robertson received four thousand five hundred pounds for the "History of Charles the Fifth;" and it is no disrespect to the memory of Robertson to say that the "History of Charles the Fifth" is both a less valuable and less amusing book than the "Lives of the Poets."

Johnson was now in his seventy-second year. The infirmities of age were coming fast upon him. That inevitable event, of which he never

thought without horror, was brought near to him, and his whole life was darkened by the shadow of death. He had often to pay the cruel price of longevity. Every year he lost what could never be replaced. The strange dependents to whom he had given shelter, and to whom, in spite of their faults, he was strongly attached by habit, dropped off one by one; and, in the silence of his home, he regretted even the noise of their scolding-matches. The kind and generous Thrale was no more; and it would have been well if his wife had been laid beside him. But she survived to be the laughing-stock of those who had envied her, and to draw from the eyes of the old man who had loved her beyond anything in the world, tears far more bitter than he would have shed over her grave. With some estimable and many agreeable qualities, she was not made to be independent. The control of a mind more steadfast than her own was necessary to her respectability. While she was restrained by her husband, a man of sense and firmness, indulgent to her taste in trifles, but always the undisputed master of his house, her worst offenses had been impertinent jokes, white lies, and short fits of pettishness ending in sunny good-humor. But he was gone; and she was left an opulent widow of forty, with strong sensibility, volatile fancy, and slender judgment. She soon fell in love with a music-master from Brescia, in whom nobody but herself could discover anything to admire. Her pride, and perhaps some better feelings, struggled hard

against this degrading passion. But the struggle irritated her nerves, soured her temper, and at length endangered her health. Conscious that her choice was one which Johnson could not approve, she became desirous to escape from his inspection. Her manner toward him changed. She was sometimes cold and sometimes petulant. She did not conceal her joy when he left Streatam: she never pressed him to return; and if he came unbidden, she received him in a manner which convinced him that he was no longer a welcome guest. He took the very intelligible hints which she gave. He read, for the last time, a chapter of the Greek Testament in the library which had been formed by himself. In a solemn and tender prayer he commended the house and its inmates to the Divine protection, and, with emotions which choked his voice and convulsed his powerful frame, left forever that beloved home for the gloomy and desolate house behind Fleet Street, where the few and evil days which still remained to him were to run out. Here, in June, 1783, he had a paralytic stroke, from which, however, he recovered, and which does not appear to have at all impaired his intellectual faculties. But other maladies came thick upon him. His asthma tormented him day and night. Dropsical symptoms made their appearance. While sinking under a complication of diseases, he heard that the woman whose friendship had been the chief happiness of sixteen years of his life had married an Italian fiddler;



that all London was crying shame upon her ; and that the newspapers and magazines were filled with allusions to the Ephesian matron and the two pictures in "Hamlet." He vehemently said that he would try to forget her existence. He never uttered her name. Every memorial of her which met his eye he flung into the fire. She, meanwhile, fled from the laughter and hisses of her countrymen and countrywomen to a land where she was unknown, hastened across Mont Cenis, and learned, while passing a merry Christmas of concerts and lemonade parties at Milan, that the great man with whose name hers is inseparably associated had ceased to exist.

He had, in spite of much mental and much bodily affliction, clung vehemently to life. The feeling described in that fine but gloomy paper which closes the series of his *Idlers* seemed to grow stronger in him as his last hour drew near. He fancied that he should be able to draw his breath more easily in a Southern climate, and would probably have set out for Rome and Naples but for his fear of the expense of the journey. That expense, indeed, he had the means of defraying ; for he had laid up about two thousand pounds, the fruit of labors which had made the fortune of several publishers. But he was unwilling to break in upon this hoard, and he seems to have wished even to keep its existence a secret. Some of his friends hoped that the Government might be induced to increase his pension to six hundred pounds a year, but this hope was disap-

pointed, and he resolved to stand one English winter more. This winter was his last. His legs grew weaker; his breath grew shorter; the fatal water gathered fast, in spite of incisions which he, courageous against pain, but timid against death, urged his surgeons to make deeper and deeper. Though the tender care which had mitigated his sufferings during months of sickness at Streatham was withdrawn, he was not left desolate. The ablest physicians and surgeons attended him, and refused to accept fees from him. Burke parted from him with deep emotion. Windham sat much in the sick-room, arranged the pillows, and sent his own servant to watch at night by the bed. Frances Burney, whom the old man had cherished with fatherly kindness, stood weeping at the door; while Langton, whose piety eminently qualified him to be an adviser and comforter at such a time, received the last pressure of his friend's hand within. When at length the moment, dreaded through so many years, came close, the dark cloud passed away from Johnson's mind. His temper became unusually patient and gentle; he ceased to think with terror of death, and of that which lies beyond death; and he spoke much of the mercy of God, and of the propitiation of Christ. In this serene frame of mind he died on the 13th of December, 1784. He was laid, a week later, in Westminster Abbey, among the eminent men of whom he had been the historian—Cowley and Denham, Dryden and Congreve, Gay, Prior, and Addison.

Since his death, the popularity of his works—the “Lives of the Poets,” and, perhaps, the “Vanity of Human Wishes,” excepted—has greatly diminished. His “Dictionary” has been altered by editors till it can scarcely be called his. An allusion to his *Rambler* or his *Idler* is not readily apprehended in literary circles. The fame even of “Rasselas” has grown somewhat dim. But though the celebrity of the writings may have declined, the celebrity of the writer, strange to say, is as great as ever. Boswell’s book has done for him more than the best of his own books could do. The memory of other authors is kept alive by their works. But the memory of Johnson keeps many of his works alive. The old philosopher is still among us in the brown coat with the metal buttons and the shirt which ought to be at wash, blinking, puffing, rolling his head, drumming with his fingers, tearing his meat like a tiger, and swallowing his tea in oceans. No human being who has been more than seventy years in the grave is so well known to us. And it is but just to say that our intimate acquaintance with what he would himself have called the anfractuosities of his intellect and of his temper, serves only to strengthen our conviction that he was both a great and a good man.

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